FIRDOUSI AND THE SHAHNAMA

By :

P. B. Vachha, M.A.,LL.B.

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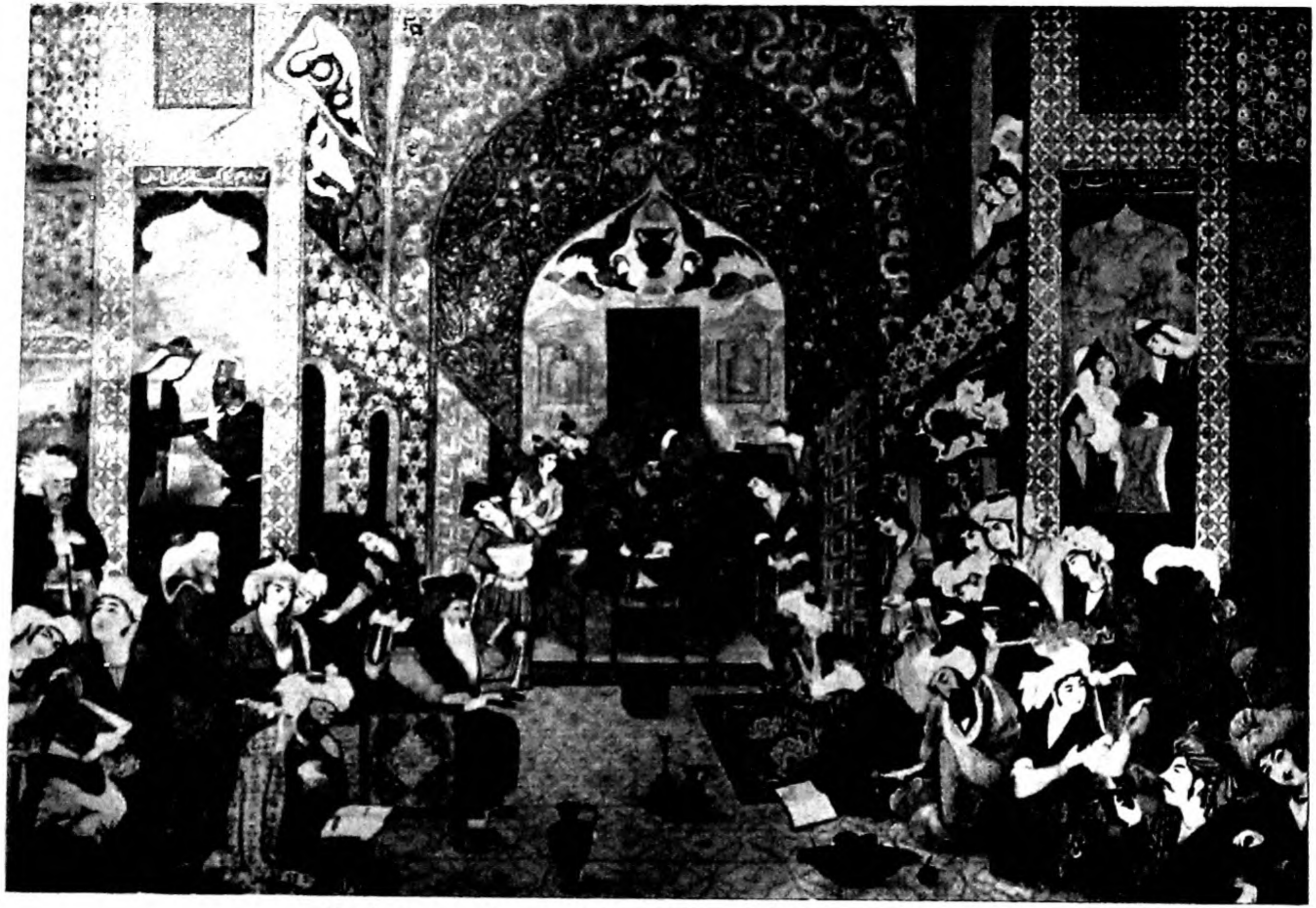

Firdousi at the Court of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi

From the original of Hadi Tajvidi, the celebrated miniaturist, in the National Gallery of Arts, Teheran.

FIRDOUSI AND THE SHAHNAMA

A Study of the Great Persian Epic of the Homer of the East.

By

P. B. Vachha, M.A., LL.B.

عشق تو در درونم و مهر تو در دلم
با شیر اندرون شد و با جان بدر شود

(حافظ)

BOMBAY

NEW BOOK COMPANY, LTD.,

188-190, Hornby Road,

1950

BOOK-SELLERS
Kooka B.G. Grant Road Corner
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(فردوسی)

Published by P. F. Dinshaw for the New Book Co., Ltd., at 188-190, Hornby Road, and printed by him at the Jam-e-Jamshed Printing Press, Ballard House, Mangalore Street, Fort, Bombay.

PREFACE

The greater part of this Essay on Firdousi and his famous Epic was written about 15 years ago, shortly after my return from Iran, which I visited in 1934 to participate in the celebrations of the Thousandth Anniversary of Firdousi's birth. But for various reasons I kept the manuscript to myself all these years—like Firdousi himself *Sukhunra nihufteh hami dashtam.* However, one or two learned friends who happened to see it, urged me to publish the Essay as filling a distinct gap in the literature on Firdousi and the Shahnama. There are, on the one hand, many scholarly studies of the great Epic written by distinguished European Orientalists, like Mohl, Noldeke, Warner and others. There are also, of course, numerous biographical and critical notices of the great poet written in Persian by his compatriots. But there is hardly any appreciation of the Shahnama written by an Oriental writer from the standpoint of Western canons of literary criticism.

I have in the following pages endeavoured to apply to Firdousi's poetry the principles of criticism, evolved by great European critics from a study of the great poetical classics of the world. Firdousi nobly stands the test of these universal standards by which the quality of great poetry is estimated by the cultured of all countries.

The present writer has, besides, the advantage of belonging to a community which claims historical and traditional association with the people whose exploits and achievements are narrated in the pages of the Shahnama. As a Parsi I can claim natural sympathy with and understanding of Firdousi's poetry in a larger measure than is possible for European writers.

The book is, of course, primarily meant for Parsis and students of Persian Literature acquainted with the Persian language. But it may be hoped that it will have some interest even for readers of English interested in poetry and literature in general. The object of the author has been to supply a handy and popular rather than scholarly introduction to

Firdousi; and it is for the informed reader to judge how far that object has been accomplished.

I have been sorely perplexed over the problem of Persian quotations from the original. They may be found to be too many or too few from opposing standpoints. The average English reader, not acquainted with Persian, may well consider the book overburdened with quotations. Those enamoured of the music of Firdousi, like me, may, on the other hand, perhaps like to have more. In any case, it was hardly possible to illustrate adequately the characteristics of Firdousi's poetry, which is the main purpose of this Essay, without extensive quotations from the original. I am confirmed in the course adopted by the opinion of the greatest literary critic of England quoted overleaf. I have not deemed it necessary to translate all these passages—particularly the long quotations in the chapter on "Style and Language". Apart from limitations of space, the merits of a poet's style and language cannot be conveyed by means of translations, however faithful or felicitous.

I should have preferred to have these Persian passages printed in the Persian script. But this has not been found practicable, and I have had reluctantly to transliterate them in the Roman script—a process which, while it involved extra labour, is scarcely expected to yield satisfactory results.

The author is obliged to the Secretary, Iran League, Bombay, for supplying the pictures appearing in this book.

Bombay, 30th November, 1950. P. B. V.

TO THE READER

"Critics give themselves great labour to draw out what in abstract constitutes the characters of a high quality of poetry. It is much better simply to have recourse to concrete examples;—to take specimens of poetry of the high, of the very highest quality, and to say: 'the characters of a high quality of poetry are what is expressed **there**.' They are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the Master than by being perused in the prose of the critic."—Matthew Arnold.

The characters of a high, the very highest, quality of poetry are to be found and felt in the verses of the Shahnama. No words of a critic, however eloquent, can convey the power and felicity of Firdousi's poetry more forcibly than a single specimen of it. The best, most illuminating, introduction to Firdousi is his poetry itself. That is why I have quoted so copiously from him. Were I addressing a purely Persian-speaking audience, I should have been content to indicate the grand passages of the Shahnama, to quote his verses, and to leave the reader to form his own estimate of the might of the Master.

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The Poem

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PART I
THE POET

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

For Firdousi's life authentic material is available in a larger measure than is perhaps the case with any other poet of equal antiquity. Short biographical notices of the great poet are to be found in historical and biographical works published not long after his death; and a number of interesting anecdotes, illustrative, if not of actual events in the poet's life, at least of the position and esteem which he enjoyed among his contemporaries, found currency in all parts of Iran from very early times. But the best and most reliable material for the post's life, and a fair estimate of his character, is furnished by autobiographical passages in the Shahnama itself. There is as yet no standard biography of the poet, unless Bāisungharkhan's Preface is to be regarded as such, consisting, as it does, of valuable historical facts, intermixed with a good deal of fantastic and even puerile fiction. However, the purpose of the present essay is to present a picture, however imperfect, of the poetry rather than the personality of the Master.

Two facts stand out significantly in connection with Firdousi and the Shahnama. First, Firdousi's authorship of the great epic has never been questioned. Nobody has ever suggested that this gigantic work is attributable to the labours of more men than one, and that man any other than the humble rustic of Toos, whose genius and ambition impelled him to leave behind his rural pursuits and surroundings, and resort to the spacious atmosphere of a splendid court. The Shahnama is not a collection of national ballads, but a single work, written continuously in the space of about 30 years by one hand. Even if the facts relating to its composition admitted of any doubt, the style and spirit of the poem, from the beginning to the end, must convince even the most

sceptical and superficial reader, that it is the product of a single mind. Historically and intrinsically, there are no features relating to the Shahnama which would suggest that it is, like the Mahābhārat, a mighty mixture of many minds and many ages. The historical existence of Firdousi, and his authorship of the epic which goes by his name, have never been doubted, as is the case with Homer and the two Greek epics, Iliad and Odyssey. With regard to the latter, it has been even remarked that the poems are the fact and Homer merely a theory to account for the fact. Homer, according to one view, has no independent existence outside his poems. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey are decidedly unities; they are not strings of separate lays or cantos. But the accounts of their author, blind, old, poor, wandering from place to place, with seven cities claiming the honour to be his birthplace, are, in the main, a mere mixture of conjecture and romance. The great poems have existed for nearly 3000 years. They are incontrovertible facts; but Homer, the greatest name in the literature of antiquity, is, perhaps, little more than a hypothesis.

No plausible theory of a different authorship, as in the case of Shakespeare, has ever been advanced by anybody in connection with the Iranian Epic; although legends persist of the national epos having been attempted by more than one writer. Thus, Unsuri, the poet-laureate of Sultan Mahmūd's court, is said to have tried his hand upon the task, and versified the episode of Rustam and Sohrāb. Unsuri's attempt has not survived the oblivion of time. The elder Asadi of Toos, who is described as Firdousi's master, is, according to a legend, supposed, at Firdousi's own dying request, to have composed the last 4000 verses of the epic. But this is an idle fiction unworthy of any serious notice. Firdousi lived for years after completing the Shahnama; and the concluding portions contain passages of such sublime power and beauty, pathos and patriotic fervour, that it is *aut* Firdousi *aut* diabolo. The legend arose probably out of a stupid confusion of Firdousi's work with the Garshásp-náma written by the younger Asadi in imitation of the Shahnama. The statement of Awfi that Daqiqi left 20,000 verses of the Sháhnáma is also entirely unsupported; and is indeed flatly contradicted

by Firdousi himself, who says explicitly that Daqiqi wrote only a thousand verses relating to the history of Gushtásp and Arjásp.

There is thus no more question that Firdousi and Firdousi alone wrote the Shāhnāma and the whole of it, (except the thousand lines of Daqiqi which he acknowledges), than that Milton wrote Paradise Lost. From the opening couplet "In the name of the Lord of Life and Reason," to the last in which he closes with a lofty confidence in his immortal fame:—

"I shall not die; henceforth I am for ever alive; for I have scattered far and wide the seeds of speech,"—it is Firdousi's work, unequal indeed in poetic power according to his theme and mood, but running at a uniform level of literary craftsmanship.

The other outstanding fact, unique in literary history, is the vogue and eminence which Firdousi has enjoyed in the country of his birth from the first. No poet ever won such instant recognition and renown from the first moment of publicity, by the product of his pen. His own generation placed him upon a pedestal of pre-eminence from which he has never been shaken, and on which he has stood for a thousand years, serene and secure, alone and unapproachable. Few poets have enjoyed such unquestioned and uninterrupted continuity of fame for such a length of time, and the ready and devoted homage of every one who has come under the spell of their music. No other poet ever had such boundless confidence in the quality of his poetry and the immortal destiny of his work. All the great masters of Iranian letters have paid tribute to him who was the prince and pioneer of them all.

Thus his great contemporary, Unsuri:—

Sukhun gar che āmad zi charkh-é buland
Tu bāzash barān burdi ay hūshmand
Tu dādi darin arsé dād-é sukhun,
Ki bādi satūda bi har anjuman,
Tu shāhanshah-é mulk-é nadhm-é dari,
Bibandad bipishat kamar Unsuri.

"Although at first the Muse came down from high heaven, O Master, thou hast again raised her to the celestial sphere.

Thou hast done justice to the demands of Poetry. May thy glories be sung in every circle! Thou art the mighty monarch of the poetic realm, and, I, Unsuri, am thy servitor."

So also his younger contemporary, Asadi, in his Garshāsp-nāma refers to Firdousi thus;

Bi Shahnāma Firdousi-é naghz-gūy
Ki az pish-é gūyandegān burd gūy.

"The exquisite singer, Firdousi, who snatched the ball of supremacy from all the poets."

Nizāmi, Anvari and Sāādi, who along with Firdousi, constitute the "four pillars" of the palace of Persian poetry, have each of them acknowledged his supremacy. Thus Nizámi;

Sukhungūy-é pishina dāna-é Toos,
Ki ārāst rūy-é sukhun chūn aroos.

"That old man eloquent, the wise one of Toos, who adorned the face of Poetry like a blooming bride."

And Saadi:—

Che khush guft Firdousi-é pākzād,
Ki rahmat barān turbat-é pāk bād.
Mayāzār mūri ki dāna kash ast,
Ki jān dārad-u jān-é shirin khush ast.

"How nobly has the pure-souled Firdousi sung—God's mercy on his blessed tomb—'Do not molest even the humble ant that drags the grain along the ground; for it has a soul and its sweet soul is dear to it."

And Anvari:—

Āfrin bar ravān-é Firdousi,
Ān humāyun nizhād-é farkhunda,
Ou na ustād būd-u ma shāgird,
Ou Khudāvand būd-u ma banda.

"Blessings and benedictions upon the spirit of Firdousi of blessed and auspicious birth! He was not our Master and we his pupils. He was our Lord and we are his slaves."

And Khāqāni:—

Sham'-é jam'-é hūshmandān ast dar daijūr-é gham,
Nuktai kaz khātar-é Firdousi-é Toosi buvad;

Zādigān-é tab'-é pākash jumlagi hurāwashand;
Zāḍeh hurāwash buvad chun mard Firdusi buvad.

"In the black night of anguish a ray from the mind of Firdousi of Toos is a veritable lamp in the assemblies of the wise. The issues of his noble intellect are all resplendent houries. Ay! those born of an inmate of Paradise (Firdousi) must be all houries!"

Fariabi addresses him thus:

Ay tāza-u muhkkam zi tu bunyād-é sukhun,
Hargiz na kunad chun tu kasi yāḍ-é sukhun.
Firdous maqām bādat, ay, Firdousi,
Insāf ki nik dādai dād-é sukhun!

"O thou by whom stand fresh and firm the foundations of Poetry! none could ever sing poetry like thee! May thy abode, O Firdousi, be for ever in Firdous (Paradise), for thou assuredly hast done full justice to Poetry."

Ibn Yamin says:

Sikkai k' andar sukhun Firdousi-é Toosi nishand,
Kāfiram gar hīch kas az jumla-é Fursi nishānd.
Avval as bālayé Kursi bar zamin āmad sukhun,
Ou digar dastash giraft-u bar sar-é Kursi nishānd.

"The stamp which Firdousi of Toos has impressed upon poetry —call me an unbelieving Kafir if any other Iranian has ever done the like of it! In the beginning the Muse came down from the celestial sphere to the earth; he once again took her by the hand and raised her up to the heavens."

Ibn Athir called the Shahnama (Q'urān-ul-ajam) the "Qur'an of Iran" long ago. Malikūs-Shuāra Bahār, the poet-laureate of Iran today, has the following;

Shahnama hast bi aghrāq Q'urān-é Ajam,
Rutba-é dāna-é Toos rutba-é payghambari.

"The Shahnama is without exaggeration the Qurān of Iran; the sage of Toos ranks with the Prophets."

These tributes can be multiplied ad infinitum. Firdousi is regarded by his countrymen as one of the prophets in the realm of letters:—

Dar shi'ar si kas payambarānand,
Harchand ki la nabiyé bā'di,
Abyāt-u qaside-u ghazalra,
Firdousi-u Anvari-u Sāādi.

"Three prophets have arisen in the realm of Poetry,—in spite of the Holy Prophet's dictum that there would be no prophet after him. They are, in masnavi, qasida, and ghazal, Firdousi, Anvari and Saadi respectively."

It is also remarkable that no other masterpiece in the world's literature has provoked so many imitations as the Shahnama; and that not only in Iran, but in other countries like Turkey and India, which have come under the sway of Iranian culture. Asadí's Garahāsp-nāma has already been mentioned. Others versifying the imaginary exploits of princes and warriors like Sām, Burzu, Farāmurz, Bahman and Alexander, followed after Firdousi in quick succession to be as quickly forgotten. Even so great a poet as Nizámi Ganjavi, handling so inspiring a theme as Alexander the Great, failed to produce a worthy rival of the Sháhnáma. Others tried their hands upon such mighty figures as Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, and the conqueror Taimur, with no better success. Innumerable metrical compositions in the epic style and metre, describing the miracles of the Prophet, the wars of Hazrat Ali, or the exploits and conquests of Kings like Tamerlane, Shah Ismail Safavi, and others, were written under varying titles like Zafar-nama, Khudāvand-nāma, Shāhinsháh-nama etc. One Shaikh Āzari wrote a Bahman-náma to celebrate the exploits of Ahmed Shah Bahmani of the Deccan in India. And the Mogul Emperors of India, from Humāyūn to Aurangzeb and Farrukhsiyar, had all their chroniclers in verse after the manner of the Sháhnáma. Hamdullāh Mustawfi, author of Tarikh-é-Guzida, composed a continuation of the Sháhnáma in 75,000 verses entitled Zafarnama. It begins with the prophet Muhammad and comes down to the author's own time, 1330 A.D. It is written in the metre of the Sháhnáma in rhymed couplets. Whatever its historical value its poetic merit is nil, being little more than rhymed prose interspersed with faded figures and phrases like *derrandi shir* and *daryai khun*, taken from Firdousi. A specimen is

quoted by Professor Browne in his Literary History of Persia Volume III at pages 96-97.

Mulla Fīrūz in the 19th century similarly versified the history of the British conquest of India in the style of Firdousi, under the name George-náma. And there have been numerous other similar attempts in Iran, India and Turkey.* But they are one and all but faint copies of the great original, and merely serve as foils to the peerless epic of Iran. Their very names are forgotten to-day.

The supremacy of Firdousi in the realm of Iranian letters may be further illustrated by the terms in which his poetry is estimated by early writers who, dealing, as they do, with the works of the general body of Persian poets known to them, were best qualified to form and reflect competent general opinion of Firdousi's powers. Nizāmi Arūzi, writing within a hundred years of the poet's death, referring to certain verses of the Shahnama which he quotes, says; "What genius, indeed, could raise poetry to such a height as he (Firdousi) does in the letter of Zal to Sam? In sheer eloquence I know of no poetry in Persian which comes up to this level, and but little in Arabic." The passage referred to is the following:—

Sipahbud navisanda ra pīsh khwāṇd,
Dil āganda budash hama bar fishāṇd.
Yaki nāma farmūd nazdiké Sāṃ,
Sarāsar navīd-u durūd-u payām,
Bikhat az nakhust āfrin gustarid,
Bidān Dādgar ku zamin āfrid;
Azūyast shāḍi azūyast zūr,
Khudāvandé Nāhid-u Bahrām-u Hūr,
Khudāvandé hast-u Khudāvandé nist
Hama bandegānim-u Izad yakist.
Azu bād bar Sāmé Nairam durūd,
Khudāvandé gupāl-u shamshir-u khūd.
Chamānanda-é dizeh hangāmé gard,
Charānanda-é kargas andar nibard.
Fazāyanda-é bād-é awurdgāh,

* A Turkish historian, named Firdousi al-Thihal, wrote a Turkish Shah-nama comprising the history of all ancient Kings of the Earth, and dedicated it to Bayazid II.

Fishānanda-é khun zi abré siyāh,
Girāyanda-é tāj-u zarrin kamar,
Nishānanda-é shah bar takht-é zar.

The beauty and grandeur of this passage cannot be conveyed by any translation. However, here is Warner's rendering:—

"The Chieftain bade a scribe to come, poured forth
His heart and wrote a letter of good cheer;
And first he praised the Maker and the Judge,
The source of joy and might, the Lord of Venus,
Of Sol and Mars, of being and not-being.
We all of us are slaves and God is one.
May He bless Sām the son of Narimān—
The lord of mace, of scimitar and helm;—
Whose black steed boundeth in the dust of fight,
Who glutteth vultures when he maketh war,
Who raiseth tempests on the battle-field,
Who sheddeth gouts of blood from murky clouds,
Who handleth golden belts and diadems,
And setteth Kings upon their thrones of gold.

Nizāmi further refers to Firdousi as "raising his verse as high as heaven, and causing it in sweet fluency to resemble running waters."

It is pointed out that the qualification "but little" in relation to Arabic letters, made by Nizāmi Arūzi, is simply out of respect for the Holy Qur'an, the supreme and divinely inspired product of the Arab mind; otherwise, but for the Holy Book, Nizāmi would have said "not even in Arabic."

Dowlatshâh, writing towards the end of the 15th century of the Christian era, with all the master-pieces of the great Persian classics from Rúdaki to Jami, before him, sums up his countrymen's estimate of Firdousi's position thus:—

"All great men and great scholars are agreed that in all this long period of Islam, a poet like Firdousi has never stepped out of the curtain of non-existence into the populous city of existence. And a just testimony in support of the truth of this claim is the Sháhnáma; which, for the last 500 years has not been successfully emulated by any created

Statue of Firdousi in Teheran.

being from among poets and writers. And such status has not been vouchsafed to any poet; and this circumstance is proof of divine guidance in the case of Firdousi."

Similarly, Awfi, writing earlier than Dowlatshah, and having similar opportunities of a comparative study of the poetical masterpieces of Iran says:

"He (Firdousi) has done full justice to poetry and exhibited complete proof of his excellence, and thereby thrown all the past writers into shame and the future ones into hesitancy and consternation. The miracle of Firdousi's art consists in this that from start to finish, he has sung in one even tenor and maintained an equal level; and his last verse has the power and freshness of the first. And this is indeed the extreme limit of poetic power and art."

European opinion of the Shahnama was expressed by the greatest and most versatile of Orientalists, Sir William Jones, over a hundred and fifty years ago, in these memorable words: "A glorious monument of Eastern genius and learning, which, if ever it should be generally understood in its original language, will contest the merit of invention with Homer himself." And the great English poet-critic, Theodore Watts-Dunton, refers to the Shahnama as a "standing wonder in the literature of poetry."

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

The absence of exact scholarship and historical research among the Persians until recently, is responsible for lack of adequate and authentic details for a reliable Life of Firdousi. A few facts recorded by early writers, like Nizami Aruzi of Samarqand, Awfi, and later Dowlatshah, have been handed down from generation to generation, largely supplemented by a number of picturesque legends and anecdotes. The main primary sources of Firdousi's life are:— (1) The Chahar Maqala, "Four Discourses" of Nizami Arúzi Samarqandi (middle of 12th century A. D.); (2) *Lubab-ul-Albab* of Muhammad Awfi (first half of 13th century); (3) The Dibāche-i-Qadim or the Old Preface; (4) Baisunghar-

khan's Preface to the Shahnama; (5) Tadhkirat-ush-Shuára of Dowlatsháh (both 15th century), and (6) a number of autobiographical passages in the Shahnama itself. We may gather from these what are more or less well-authenticated events of the poet's life.

NAME.

Firdousi ("of Paradise") is the poetic pen-name of this great poet, and he occasionally addresses himself by this name in the course of his poem, although mostly he refers to himself as *Gūyandeh,* i.e. speaker or singer. His Kuniya, according to all traditions, is Abúl-Qásim, but as regards his name it is variously given as Hasan, Ahmad and Mansūr. There is also great difference as regards his father's name which is either Ali, or Ishāq, or Sharafsháh, or Ahmed b. Farrukh.

Thus his full name, according to the above-named Dowlatshah-e-Samarqandi, was Hasan b. Ishāq b. Sharafshāh. According to Bāisungharkhan's Preface his name was Abul Qāsim Mansūr, and his father's Fakhruddin Ahmed b. Farrukh al Firdousi. *The Majma-ul-Fusaha* (a Modern Anthology—1878) gives the poet's full name thus:—

Abul-Qāsim Hasan b. Ishāq b. Sharafsháh; Muhammad b. Mansūr b. Fakhruddin Ahmed b. Hakim Maulana Farrukh; whereas according to the *Tārikh-e-Guzīda* (A. D. 1330) his real name was Abul Qāsim Hasan b. Ali of Toos. According to Dowlatsháh, the pen-name Firdousi was assumed by the poet from a garden called Firdous (Paradise) which his father tended. He was a dihqān from the village of Razān near Toos. The dihqáns were a class of superior farmers and small landholders, hardy and independent, and proud of their pure and ancient blood.

DATE OF BIRTH

Firdousi's life covered about 80 to 90 years and fell approximately between the years 930 and 1020 A. D. The date of his birth may be approximately fixed from the mention of his age in the Shahnama itself. In the concluding lines of the great epic he says:—

Chu sāl andar āmad bihaftād-u yak,

Hami zīr-é shi ar andar āmad falak.

"When my years reached 71, the heavens themselves fell under my lofty rhyme." And a few lines later he gives the date of the completion of the Shahnama:

Zi hijrat shuda panj hashtād bār,

Ki guftam man in nāma-é shāhwār.

"Of the hegira year it was 5 times 80 (i.e. A. H. 400) when I finished this royal book."

This would give us A. H. 329 as the year of his birth. Elsewhere also he complains of being about 80 when his toils were ended and his hopes blasted.

Kanun umr nazdik-é hashtād shud,

Umidam biyak bāra barbād shud.

"Now when my age is nearing 80, my hopes are all blasted."

On these and other considerations, Nöldeke suggests A. H. 323 or 324, corresponding to A. D. 935-36 as the date of Firdousi's birth. Dowlatsháh states 421 A. H. as the year of his death when he was about 90 years old. So that in all probability he was born not long before 330 A. H.

BIRTHPLACE

TOOS.

There is no dispute that Firdousi was born at or near Toos, a very ancient city of Khorásán. Its name connects it with a great Iranian chief, Toos, a scion of royal blood, who figures largely in the pages of the Shahnama, and who is said to have founded it—as Firdousi himself, according to a legend, explained to Sultán Mahmúd of Ghazni.* Toos at the present day has been practically wiped out from the map of Iran, and its site occupied by the modern Meshhed. Meshhed is famous as containing the tomb and shrine of Ali Músa-ar-Riza, the 8th Imam, or spiritual lord and leader of the Shias; and as such is the resort of pilgrims from all parts of the Islamic world. The place is held in great veneration, and is generally referred to as *Khák-e-Pák* or *Erz-e-Aqdas* (i.e. the Holy Land). In October 1934, however, Toos, after

* As Prof. Sherani points out, this cannot be correct, since according to the Shahnama itself, Toos existed from the most ancient times.

centuries of oblivion, suddenly became a place of pilgrimage for men of learning and letters from all parts of the world. Distinguished writers, scholars and Orientalists, representing England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Arabia, Japan, India and America assembled at Teheran, in response to the invitation of H. I. M. Reza Shah Pahlavi, to celebrate the millenary of Firdousi's birth. From Teheran the brilliant cavalcade travelled eastwards 600 miles over stony ways to where, beyond the confines of the city of the golden domes, a noble memorial marks the sacred spot covering the mortal remains of the immortal bard. Thus Toos, hallowed as the birth and burial place of Firdousi, came to life again after a thousand years, and witnessed a nation's homage to its sovereign singer.

It is difficult to say at the present day whether Toos and the country around it contained in the time of Firdousi any impressive memorials of the ancient Parsi Empire. The great ruins of Persipolis, which strike every traveller with awe and wonder by their solemn grandeur, lie in the western region of Iran, far from the home of Firdousi. Still there can be little doubt that the whole atmosphere of the country in which he lived was teeming with associations and memories of the great past. Khorāsān and the Eastern districts of Iran have always been less exposed to foreign influences and must therefore have retained the national sentiment in great vigour. Even supposing that there were no conspicuous monuments of past history in Firdousi's native province, still the entire land, every brook and hill, was haunted by heroic memories; and in the blood of the people there were passionate pride and love and sorrow for that imperial race which had made the name of Iran famous in history. Change of religion and rulers could not completely efface the marks and memory of what had been. The large body of people has tenaciously clung to this great heritage of a heroic past as a precious national asset; and their highest ideals of justice, generosity, courage and magnificence are still expressed by reference to that ancient history which they cannot forget. The supreme justice is still the justice of Faridūn and Noushirwạ̄n; the extreme of royal splendour still that of Jamshid or Kay-Khusrav; and the most extravagant

compliment that a courtly flatterer could think of, to soothe the vanity of the most valiant and successful warrior, would be to call him another Rustam. The best, bravest and wisest of modern kings, soldiers and statesmen can only hope to be copies of the great ancients. This rich remembrance is the fountainhead of their inspiration, and has deeply coloured their whole thought and literature. In the passage of time this treasure of memory must inevitably have faded and been forgotten. It became preserved and crystallised in the glowing pages of the Shahnama. In Firdousi's time the memory was fresh, and the soil of Iran was still impressed, as it were, with the footprints of Rustam and Ardashir; and the air still redolent with the fragrance of heroic ages. He breathed deeply of this air; and what he thus inhaled with the air and imbibed with the waters of the running streams, he transmuted into the noble strains which have since filled the earth with his own and his country's fame. To him the búlbúl (nightingale) wailed eternally for young Isfandiár's death; the cloud thundered with the voice of Rustam; the waters of the ocean were ever agitated in lamentation for the death of Siąwush; the sun gleamed like the Kāviāni banner; the spring-garden blossomed like the court of Kay-Khusrav.

Nigeh kun sahargāh ta bishnavi,
Zi bulbul sukhun guftan-é pahlavi.
Hami nąlad az margé Isfandiyār
Nadārad bijuz nąla zu yądgār
Zi āwāz-é Rustam shabé tira abr
Biderrad dil-é shir-u chang-é hazhabr.

"Oh list at early dawn that thou mayst hear
The Búlbúl speak the sweet, soft Pahlavi speech:
Still, still it wails o'er young Isfandiyár's death,
Remembering nought but this sad wailing since.
With Rustam's deep dread voice, the dark night through,
The thunder-cloud doth shake the lion's heart,
And tear the tiger's paw."

Stories and legends of the old days were current among all classes of people in the time of Firdousi and were eagerly and rapturously listened to:—

Chu az daftar in dāstānha basi,
Hami khwạ̄nd khwānanda bar har kasi,
Jehan dil nihādé barin dạ̄stān,
Hamạ̄n bikhradān-u hamān rāstan,
"When from the chronicle the reader read
These many tales, the world—the wise, the good—
All set their hearts upon these wonderous tales."

Already Rustam had attained the proportions of a national hero, and the stirring stories of his feats were immensely popular:

Shigifti bigiti zi Rustam basīst;
Azu dāstān dar dil-é har kasīst.

"There is much marvel at great Rustam's deeds in all the world, and people's hearts are filled with tales about him."

We can well imagine how the poet's eager mind from his childhood fed on these tales of wonder and adventure, and how he must have burned with the desire of setting his own mark upon the story of his country. Again and again, throughout the poem, he fervently prays to God to spare him till he has accomplished this cherished idea. Like Milton he had dedicated himself to a great task, and like Scott, from early childhood, he was consciously and unconsciously preparing himself for the national work.

We have no record of Firdousi's pedigree. But as belonging to the class of the hardy and pure dihqáns, there is no doubt that he possessed in the fullest measure the ancient blood of the Kayánians and Sássánians. Though born of poor and obscure parents, his utterances have the ring of unmistakable high breeding. His expressed contempt of low blood and short pedigrees also marks him out as a gentle-blooded scion of ancient lineage. Like Āzạ̄d Sarv of Merv who told him the story of Rustam's death, we might say, "his line stretched back to Sạ̄m of Narimạ̄n."

Bi Sām-é Narimān kashidash nizhād
Basi dāshti razm-é Rustam biyạ̄d.

EDUCATION

Equally meagre is our knowledge of Firdousi's schooling and education. But it cannot be doubted that he acquired the customary learning of his time, both in Persian and Arabic, and must have attended local schools. There is in the story of Noushirwán's great minister, Būzarjamihr, a vivid and realistic description of the narrow self-importance and despotic methods of a pedagogue with his pupils, which is, perhaps, reminiscent of his own school days: "The King's messenger saw a Mūbed with the lore of Zend and Avesta. He taught Zend to the children with insolence, and wrath and loud shouting. One of the boys before him engaged in poring over Avesta and Zend was named Būzarjamihr; he had devoted himself to the study of that book. The Mubed (King's messenger) turned from the road and consulted the pedagogue about the King's dream. The scribe said, "This is none of my business; my learning in all respects is confined to Zend. I know only how to teach these children; I dare not breathe outside these limits." When the boy Būzarjamihr heard this conversation, he gave his ears to it and his countenance lit up. He addressed the teacher, "this is my quarry; I can interpret this dream." The man of sacred lore turned firecely upon the boy and shouted, "Have you done your lessons that you crane your neck with vain presumption and propose to interpret a dream?"

There is, however, no specific mention of any teacher or divine who contributed to the shaping of his magnificent intellect.

The language of the Shahnama is remarkable for a conscious and deliberate avoidance of the Arabic element. But it may be safely assumed that Firdousi was well acquainted with the Arabic language. He indeed declares explicity in one of his lyrics :

Basi ranj didam basi gufta khwāndam,

Zi guftār-é tāzi-u az pahalwāni.

"Much have I toiled, and widely read am I in Arabic and Pahlavi letters."

Although he drew largely upon Pahlavi chronicles for his narrative, some people doubt whether he had a first-hand acquaintance with the Pahlavi tongue. This would, indeed, be strange for one who was so deeply steeped in Sassanian history and literature, and who derived his information about Sāssānian Kings, from Ardashīr to Yezdegird, from Pahlavi sources. Some competent persons, however, are of opinion that he depended on translations of Pahlavi texts into Persian or Arabic for his knowledge of Pahlavi literature. On the other hand,* verses like the following seem to imply a knowledge of both Pahlavi and Arabic :

Agar pahalwāni nadāni zabān,
Bitāzi tu Urvandra Dajla khwān.

"If you are not acquainted with the Pahlavi tongue then know that Arvend is called Dajla in Arabic."

Judged by modern standards Firdousi's learning appears crude and limited. He had very vague and confused notions of philosophy, history and geography. He talks very vaguely of foreign lands like Rúm, Hind and Chin; and refers generally to distant countries in terms of Fableland. Nor is his knowledge of history in general exact or accurate. Barring the chronicle of Sássānian times, his accounts of even Iranian Kings and chieftains are confused and largely legendary belonging more to the region of poetry and romance than of history. Similarly, his notions of philosophy and learning in general are crude and even childish. He has only one method of testing a man's knowledge and learning, and that is by putting riddles. Thus, young Zāl is solemnly examined by a conclave of grave and reverend counsellors in a number of pretty obvious riddles; and it is only the extreme beauty and majesty of his language that saves the situation at times from becoming ludicrous.

On the other hand, Firdousi's knowledge of military strategy and manoeuvres is so minute and profound, that it may be surmised that he had received military training and

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* Also

Kuja biwar az pahalwani shumar,
Buwad dar zabane dari dih hazar—

"Bivar in the Pahlavi reckoning is ten thousand in our current speech."

made a study of the science of war. He seems to be at home in the arts of archery, swordsmanship, horsemanship and fortification. He is among the greatest of war-poets; and excels not only in descriptions of single combats but of sieges and general engagements. He displays a perfect knowledge of weapons of war and the dispositions of troops, both infantry and cavalry, in battle array. In fact, books have been written in Iran to show that Firdousi was a master of military strategy and art; and the knowledge of the details and technique of campaigns which he displays in the pages of of the Shahnama could scarcely have been acquired without some study, if not actual experience. * The same may be said about his knowledge of hunting and the chase, and of court etiquette. He had also in all probability, studied music.

ANCIENT CHRONICLES

However, the main objective, purpose, and masterbias of Firdousi's life and mind were to compose the national epic of Iran; and from early childhood he devoted his powers and labours to equipping himself for that mighty work. He pored over the records of old times and gathered all available materials. This material, in fact, had been accumulating for ages. Although the vandalism of the conquerors, after the overthrow of the Sássánian Empire, had caused great gaps in the history of Iran, still enough material remained to revive the dead past which could not be buried altogether out of sight.

The ancient Iranian Kings, notably the later Sássánians, were fond of collecting historical records. There is mention of such collections having been made, among others, by Noushirwán and Khusrav Parwíz. In the time of the last Sássánian King, Yezdegird, all the stories and legends pertaining to the nation's history were, it is stated, collected in one volume by one Dánishwar Dihqán and called Khudāi-nāma. This volume, or transcripts of it, survived in a more or less complete form the destructive zeal of the Arabs. It attained a wide circulation and popularity, and became the fountainhead of Iranian history and legends. According to

* "Farmandahi-i-Khudavand-i-jung Sipahbud Firdousi," compiled by Ahmed Bahar-mast.

Bāisungharkhán's Preface, it travelled as far out of Iran as India and Abyssinia, which, however, is an obvious myth.

In the time of Yāqúb b. Leith Saffār (founder of the Brazier Dynasty, A.D. 868) this chronicle is said to have been translated from Pahlavi into Persian, by one Abu al-Mansūr al-Ma 'māri for Abu Manūr Abdur Razzāq b Abdulla Farrukh, the then Governor of Toos; and some additions were made to it. He is said to have been assisted in his work by four others, whose names clearly indicate their Parsi origin, viz, Táj or Shāḳh Khorāsāni of Heraṭ, Yezdāndāḍ Shāpur of Sistan, Māhui b Khurshīd of Nishāpur, and Shādān b Barzin* of Toos; all belonging to Khorāsān, Sistān and the Eastern districts of Iran, which region, as stated above, was distinguished by a greater vitality and vigour of national feeling, and was also the home of Firdousi.*

The account given in the Dibáche-i-Qadím is as follows: Abu Mansúr Abdur-Razzāq, who was a man of lofty aspirations and descended from the ancient Iranian warriors, wished to leave a memorial of himself behind him. He accordingly directed his minister Abu Mansúr al-Ma'māri to call a conference of scholars and historians and collect all the materials. Various men of learning, like Shákh from Herat, Yezdāndād Shāpúr from Sistan, Māhui Khurshíd, the son of Behram, from Nishāpur, and Shādān the son of Barzin from Toos, collated the manuscripts and compiled the history of Iran from Kayúmarth to Yezdegird the last king of the Sássánian dynasty and called it Sháhnáma, in A.H. 246. This is supported by Firdousi's own statement in the Shahnama: "There was a book of ancient times full of goodly episodes. It lay scattered in the hands of the Mubeds, and all wise men derived benefit from it. There was a great chieftain of noble lineage, brave, exalted, wise and liberal. He was interested in the research of early times, and he searched for past writings. He called together from all districts aged Mubeds who had collected the ancient chronicles. The Mubeds all repeated before him the tales of ancient Monarchs and the

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* Firdousi also mentions by name some of these men in the course of his poem. Thus Shadan-e-Barzin is mentioned in the account of Noushirwan's sending the physician Burzui to India for bringing the miraculous medicine:

And Mahui Khurshid of the Dibache is probably the Shahu-i-Pir whom Firdousi refers to.

vicissitudes of the world. When the Chieftain had heard them all he laid the foundation for a noble tome which has remained such a worthy memorial in the world. The praises of the great and the small be upon him !"

This prose Shahnama of Abu Mansūr is the basis of Firdousi's Shahnama, and is constantly referred to by him as the "daftar" or chronicle. The bulk of it was taken from more ancient Pahlavi chronicles, in particular the "Khvatāi-nāmak" or "Khudāi-nāma" "Book of Kings", alleged to have been compiled by Dāneshwar Dihqān* in the time of Yezdegird, the last Sāssąnian Monarch, and which contained an account of the rulers of Iran from Kayūmarth to Khusrav Parvīz. This work was translated into Arabic by Ibn Muqaffa about the middle of the 8th century A. D. But Ibn Muqaffa's translation as well as the original Pahlavi chronicle are both irretrievably lost.

The Sāmānide princes who came into power after the "Brazier" dynasty and who claimed descent from Bahrām Chūbin, were extremely fond of ancient history. The native literature flourished under them; in their time arose the first great poet of modern Iran, Rudaki; and it was under their patronage that the first recorded attempt was made to versify the history of Iran, by the poet Daqíqí.

Next we are told that seven poets of the court of Sultan Mahmūd were entrusted with the work of composing the Shahnama; among them the poet-laureate Unsuri; whose attempt has already been referred to. Fortunately for the credit of Iran and the glory of literature all these attempts were tentative or unsuccessful; and the work of versifying the national history remained practically untouched for the one man who possessed the spirit, the equipment, and the genius necessary for the stupendous work. The fragments of his predecessors must be relegated to the category of mere preparation of material for the Master-magician who alone was capable of transmuting it into sterling gold, and stamping it with the impress of a genius which has given it universal currency for a thousand years :

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* The Dihqans, as Noldeke explains, were the lower landed gentry and were the actual preservers of the national traditions and legends. Firdousi himself was a dihqan of Toos.

Firdousi's attainment and mental equipment are practically confined to the history, legends and letters of his native land, supplemented by a knowledge of the Arabic language and literature. As regards the latter it is noteworthy that not only does he not employ any Arabic tag or quotation to embellish his writing, as most of his successors have done; but he does not mention a single Arabic poet or historian by name in the course of his narrative. Nor does he specifically refer to any Arabic sources of information, so much so that, but for internal evidences of his acquaintance with the Arabic language and his own declarations, one would feel inclined to doubt his knowledge of the language and culture, which suppressed and superseded the literature of Iran. It is noteworthy that he does not quote anywhere even the Holy Qurán, although according to Prof. Sherāni, there are a few allusions to the verses of the Qurán and the Hadīth in the Shahnama.

Although Firdousi constantly and rather indiscriminately mentions Zend-o-ust he does not appear to have had any knowledge of Zend or Avesta, the language of the Zoroastrian scriptures. Indeed, there is no evidence that he was directly acquainted with the contents of any of the Avesta writings, although the traditions recorded in the pages of the Shahnama find considerable support in Parsi sacred scriptures, notably the Yashts. He frequently refers to Bāj, Barsam, Mihrgān and other religious practices and festivals of Zoroastrians.

On the other hand, it may be safe to surmise that Firdousi had studied astrology. Not only is he well acquainted with astrological terms, but he revels in astrological forecasts, and seldom misses an opportunity of displaying his knowledge of the stars. In fact, according to the Shahnama, consulting the *sitārahshumar* or astrologer, on every important occasion was an established institution in ancient Iran. Thus when Zāl desires to marry Rudābeh, who is descended from Zahhāk, both his father Sām and King Manúchehr consult the astrologers before giving their sanction. "He broached the subject before the astrologers and inquired what would be the end of it all. "To mix together two adverse elements like fire and water, would be radically a torture. Verily on the day of reckoning there would be a battle between Faridún

and Zahhák. You now search the stars and give your judgment. Lay the point of your pen upon an auspicious picture." They studied and then came forward laughing that the two adversaries had come together by their fortune (It was divinely ordained that the young couple although of hostile lineage should come together.) Thus spake the star-gazer to Sām of Narimān 'O thou golden-belted warrior; here is good news about Zāl and the daughter of Mihrāb, for they would make blessed mates for each other. Of these two would be born a powerful lion (Rustam) who would gird up his loins in manliness. He will subjugate the whole world with his sword, and would elevate the throne of the Shah above the clouds. He would leave neither Sagsār nor Māzinderān, and would sweep the earth clean with his battle-axe' ".

Elsewhere also he frequently refers to astrological forecasts:

Sitāra-shumur guft Bahrām-ra,
Ki dar chār-shamba mazan-gāmrā.

"The astrologer said to Bahrām, 'do not start on your campaign on a Wednesday.' "

Chu Kaywān biburjé tarāzu shavad
Jehān ziré niruy-é bāzu shavad.

"When the Saturn shall enter the sign of Libra, all the world will come under the power of force."

Rustam Farrukhzād, commander of the Iranian forces at the fatal battle of Qādasiyah, was well versed in astrology. He forecasts the doom of the battle and prepares for the fight in a spirit of gloomy foreboding and despondency:

Bidānist Rustam shumār-é sipihr,
Sitāra-shumur bud ba dād-u mihr;
Hami guft kin razm-ra rūy nist,
Rah-é āb-é shāhān bidin jūy nist,
Biyāwurd sullāb-u akhtar gireft,
Zi rūz-é bala dast bar sar gireft,
Digar guft kaz girdish-é āsmān,
Pazhūhanda mardum shavad bad-gumān.
Ki in khāna az pādshāhi tuhist,

Na hangāmé firūzi-u farrahist.
Zi chārum hami bingarad āftāb
Kizin jang māra bad āyad shitāb.
Zi Bahrām-u Zuhrast māra gazand,
Nashāyad guzashtan zi charkh-é buland.
Hamān Tīr-u Kaywān barābar shudast,
Utārad biburj-é Dupaykar shudast.
Hama būdaniha bi binam hami,
Wazān khāmushi bar guzinam hami.
Mara kāshaki in khirad nisti,
Ki agāhi-é ruz-é bad nisti.

"Rustam who was an astrologer well understood the heavenly calculations. He said, 'Dark is the aspect of this battle; the waters of royalty do not flow along this channel." He took the astrolabe and measured the stars, and raised his hands in helplessness over the coming doom. He said to himself, 'The seeker after knowledge is bound to have misgivings from the movements of the heavens. For this house is devoid of kingship, and the hour is not propitious for victory and joy. The sun glares balefully from the Fourth House, which portends evil to us out of this battle. Mars and Venus are adverse to us; but we cannot rise above the lofty sky. Mercury and Saturn are in conjunction, and Mercury is in the House of Gemini. Such is the state of things and a great catastrophe is impending; and I am weary of life. I see all that is to be and I would prefer to remain silent. Would to God I did not possess this learning, so that I might not have a fore-knowledge of the evil day!"

FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Of Firdousi's family we know little. According to Dibāche-i-Qadīm, Firdousi's father had two sons, one Hakim Abul Qāsim Al-Mansūr al Firdousi, and the other Mas'ūd. But no brother is mentioned in the Shahnama. His oldest biographer Nizāmi Arūzi states that he left "a very high-spirited daughter," who rejected the belated gift of Sultan Mahmūd which reached Toos after the poet's death. But Dowlatshah in the same connection says that he left only a sister. There is no reference to either in the Shahnama; unless one is minded to attach particular significance to a verse which is frequently repeated:

Kira dar pas-é purda dukhtar buvad,
Agar tāj dārad bad akhtar buvad.

"Whoever has a daughter in his house is an ill-starred man even though he wear a crown."

But it would be rash to infer from this that he had a troublesome daughter or any daughter at all. On the other hand, he invariably mentions a mother's love with warm regard and reverence. In many beautiful lines he alludes to a mother's deep and noble love:

Ki parvardigār az pidar bartar ast,
Hamān rāz ba mihrbān mādar ast.

"For one who nurtures us is higher than the father, and that is the reason for one's loving mother's superior claim."

Again:—

Bikirdār-é mādar budi ta kanūn,
Hami rikht bar dard-é ma zār khūn.

"Till now, (O Sky) thou wast to me like a loving mother, and shed'st thy heart's blood over my sufferings."

The mother's loving and suffering heart is again and again laid bare. It is the mother who sorrows over her lost or unfortunate child, and who rejoices at his triumphs. Thus the devotion of Farának, the mother of Farídun, to her son is remarkable; as also of Firangís to Kay Khusrav; and Rudábah's mother Síndukht is portrayed as devoted to her daughter's welfare.

There is in all literature probably no more poignant expression of a mother's grief and love than Tahmina's lament over Sohráb's death. It is noteworthy how completely Firdousi could enter into a mother's feelings and express the innermost reactions of a woman's heart to a grievous sorrow. Contrast Tahmina's lament, all womanly tenderness and choking despair, with Farídún's terrible denunciation of his son's murderers.

Firdousi was married early in life, for a son was born to him when he was 28; but there is no mention anywhere of any wife of the poet either by himself or by any of his biographers. In the beginning of the Dāstān of Bézhun, in

a magnificent passage of lyric beauty, he refers to a nameless beloved of his who tells him the story of Bézhun and Maníjeh. For a man so morally pure as Firdousi, in all probability this reference is to his lawfully-wedded wife.

The son born to him when he was 28 died in the prime of manhood when he himself had passed his 65th year. This grievous loss he bewails in one of the most touching and beautiful passages in the Shahnama. It occurs in the Dāstāṇ of Bahrām Chúbin in the reign of Khusrav Parvíz:—

Mara sāl bugzasht bar shast-u panj,
Na niku buvad gar biyāzam biganj.
Magar bihra bar giram az pand-é khish
Biyandisham az marg-é farzand-é khish.
Mara bud naubat biraft ān jawān,
Zi dardash manam chun tani birawāṇ.
Shitabam magar ta hami yābamash,
Chu yāṇbam bi paygāra bishtābamash.
Ki naubat mara bud tu bikām-é man
Chira rafti-u burdi āṛām-é man.
Zi badha tu budi mara dastgir,
Chera rāh justi zi hamrāṇh-é pir.
Magar hamrahān-é jawān yāṇfti,
Ki az pish-é man tīz bishtāfti?
Jawān-ra chu shud sāṇl bar si-u haft,
Na bar ārzu yāṇft giti-u raft.
Hami būd hamwāra bāman durusht,
Barāshuft-u yakbāṛa binmud pusht.
Biraft-u ghamu ranjash idar bimānd,
Dil-u dida-é man bikhun dar nishānd,
Kanun ou souy-é rushnāi rasid,
Pidar-ra hami jāy khwāhad guzid.
Barāmad chunin ruzgāri darāz,
Kizān hamrahān kas nagashtand bāz,
Hamāna mara chashm dārad hami,
Zi dir āmadan khashm dāṛad hami.
Mara shasht-u panj-u wara si-u haft,
Napursid azin pirū tanha biraft.
Wai andar shitāb-u man andar dīrang,
Zi kirdārha ta ché āṛyad bichang.
Rawān-é tu Dāranda roushan kunād,

Khirad pish-é jān-é tu joushan kunād!
Hami khāham az Dāvar-é Kirdegār,
Zi rūzi-dahé pāk Parvardigār,
Ki yaksar bibakhshad gunāh-é tura.
Dirakhshān kunad tira māhé tura.
"My years have passed the bounds of sixty-five,
And ill becomes it me to lust for gold.
O let me profit by my own wise words,
And contemplate my own dear child's decease.
It was my turn to go; the young man went.
The pain deprives my body of its soul.
Oh, let me haste and overtake him yet,
And when I meet him, let me tax him thus:
'It was my turn: why didst thou go against
My wish, depriving me of all my peace?
Thou wast my friend and staff, my help in woe,
Why didst thou seek to separate from me,
Thy comrade old? Didst thou find younger friends,
That thus thou left'st me sharp and suddenly?'
When he attained the age of thirty-seven,
He found the world not to his taste, and went.
Harsh and unkind he was to me;
His anger rose and once for all he went.
He went; and here the grief and pain remain.
My heart and eyes are drowned in blood.
Now he has reached the light of yond bright world;
There he will choose a place for me as well.
And long the time has rolled, but none of those
That went, my comrades on the way, return.
Perhaps even now he looks for me to go,
And chafes at my delay in reaching him.
I am at sixty-five, at thirty-seven he.
He spake no word to me, and went alone.
He hied in haste while I drag slowly on,
To see what meed awaiteth on our deeds.
Oh may the Lord shed light upon thy soul!
And may his shield of Wisdom guard it still!
This is my prayer to the Just Lord of Life,

—Who gives our daily bread to nourish us—
That He may pardon all thy faults and sins,
And brighten up thy soul's dust-darkened moon!"

In these few simple lines we have the father's bleeding heart laid bare, full of passionate love and sorrow for an unfortunate child. It is pitiable to think that this one son and hope of the poet was, perhaps, something of a thorn in his father's side. His love however is strong as death. That there was something unusual in his relations with his son, and that his feelings in this respect were of a more poignant character than ordinary, may be inferred from the frequency and emphasis with which he refers to a father's love, authority, and grief in the course of the poem. It is also noteworthy that in the majority of cases the relations between father and son, as described in the Shahnama, are of a painful nature. The sons are very often depicted as either wicked or unfortunate. Thus in the very commencement we have the instance of Kayumarth and his ill-starred son Siyamak. Next comes the account of the pious Mardās and his monster of a son Zahhāk. Then we have the extremely painful and complicated relations of Faridun with his three sons, one unfortunate, and the other two wicked. Then we have the temporary estrangement between Sām and his son Zāl. Lastly the fatal case of Sām's grandson Rustam and his son Sohrāb, which, as we know, has inspired one of the most powerful and pathetic stories in the world. The episode of Rustam and Sohrāb is immediately succeeded by that of Siāwush, another great tragedy resulting from unhappy relations between father and son. Once again, in Gushtāsp and Isfandiyār we have the same tragic tale repeated. And in the later history of Iran we have several other instances of such relations, of the maltreatment of son by father or of father by son. Thus, omitting the cases of temporary estrangements, like that of Hormuz and Khusrav Parwíz, we have Nūshzād and Shirūya, as types of rebellious sons. It was Firdousi's sad fate to experience in his own person this bitter grief for the untimely loss of a perhaps undutiful but well-beloved child. "He was ever harsh and unkind to me; his anger rose and once for all he went."

FRIENDS AND PATRONS.

Firdousi is less reticent about his friends and patrons than about his family. In the preface, he gratefully remembers the assistance and encouragement of a dear friend whom however he does not name:

Bishihram yaki mihrbān dūst bud,
Tu gufti ki bāman biyak pūst bud.

"I had in town a loving friend; you might say that he was with me contained within a single skin."

Next, in the same place he mentions an exalted chief, descended from the ancient warriors, who is identified with Abu Mansūr, the Governor of Toos, and who seems to have assisted him substantially in early life. His foul assassination he bewails in a few powerful verses:—

Sarāsar jehāṇ pish-é ou khwār būd,
Jawānmard būd-u wafādār būd.
Nazu zinda binam na murda nishān,
Bidast-é nihangāṇ-é mardumkushān.

"Faithful and generous he was, and he altogether despised the world. I see no trace of him, alive or dead, crushed in the claws of murderous crocodiles."

Amir Nasr, a brother of Sultan Mahmūd, and "the brave military commander of Toos," is also mentioned among persons of whom he had high expectations.

Next, as he proceeds with the poem, he mentions various persons from whom he derived historical materials, like Āzād Sarv of Merv, Shādāṇ Burzín, Shāhui Pír, Mākh, the Murzbān of Herat etc. Lastly, at the end of the book he singles out three friends and patrons who helped him in his work and comforted him in distress, Ali Daylam, Bu Dalaf, and Husain or Huai-i-Qatīb. Of these, according to the *Chahār Maqāla,* Ali Daylam transcribed the Shāhnāma for the poet in seven volumes, Abu Dalaf was his *rāvi* or repeater, and Husain-i-Qatīb was the revenue collector of Toos, who took upon himself to remit Firdousi's taxes. They are mentioned in the concluding passage of the poem :

Buzurgān-u ba dānish āzādgan,
Nabishtand yaksar hama rāygān.

Nishasta nizāra man az dūr-é shān
Tu gufti budam pīsh mazdūr-é shān,
Juz ahsant azishān na bud bihra-am,
Bikift andar ahsant-é shān zihra-am
Sar-é badrahāé kuhan basta shud,
Azān band roushan dilam khasta shud,
Azān nāmwar nāmdāran-é shihr,
Ali Daylam-u Bu Dalaf'rā'st bihr
Ki hamwāra kāram be khūbi rawān,
Hami dīd ān mard-é roushan ravān.
Husayn-é Qatib ast az āzādgān,
Ki azman nakhwāhad sukhun rāygān.
Azuyam khurū pushish-u simu zar,
Azu yāftam jumbish-u pā-u par.
Nayam āgeh az asl-u far-'é kharāj,
Hami ghaltam andar mayān-é dawāj.

"The great and learned leaders of the land all transcribed (my poem) gratis. I awaited expectant at a distance from them; you might say I was like a hired labourer before them. I received nothing but "well done !" from them; my gall-bladder split in sorrow at their "well dones". The mouths of money bags of old were closed to the distress of my bright heart. But among the noble, distinguished citizens there were Ali Daylam and Bu Dalaf who deserve a meed of praise. These illustrious men kept my work and affairs going smoothly. Among the nobles there was Husain-i-Qatīb who would not have me sing gratis. From him I had food and raiment, silver and gold; from him I found my feet and wings and power to move. I am unconscious of the taxes, root and branch; and I roll at ease in a soft, silken quilt."

In certain places the poet also praises the Dastúr or minister of the king. The minister is named Fazl bin Ahmad by himself in one place. The *Chahār Māqāla* however mentions "the great minister Ahmed-i-Hasan, the secretary, "by which," according to Professor Browne, "no doubt the prime minister Ahmed bin al-Hasan al Maimandi is meant." Ibn Isfandiyār, however, has Husain bin Ahmad. Dowlatshah too refers to Al-Maimandi as Firdousi's patron. Now this is a very perplexing point. Firdousi does not mention Maimandi

anywhere as either his patron or enemy, not even in the Hajw. In Bāisungharkhán's Preface Maimandi is expressly mentioned as the poet's enemy who poisoned the King's ears against him; and the Sultan's favourite Ayāz is represented as Firdousi's firm friend. Dowlatshah, on the other hand, states that Ayāz was hostile because the poet had slighted him. Verses in praise of Ayāz's looks ascribed to Firdousi are quoted in the *Atish*-Kadah and other anthologies. * Popular tradition generally condemns Al-Maimandi as the enemy of the poet at court, and regards Ayāz as his friend.

But that the poet had a secret enemy at court who spoilt his cause is certain. The first explicit reference to this nameless enemy, as far as I am able to recollect, occurs in the history of Noushirwán at the end of the chapter on Shatranj (chess) :

Dilaz Shah Mahmud khurram budi,
Agar rāhé bad-gouharān kam budi.

"My heart would have been happy with Shah Mahmūd, if the low-born had less access to him."

Next in the dāstān of Khusrav and Shirin :—

Hasad burd badgūy dar kār-é man,
Tabah shud bar-é shah bāzār-é man.
Nakard andarin dāstānha nigāh,
Zi badgūy-u bakht-é bad āmad gunah.

"A slanderer grew envious of my work, and spoilt my market before the king. He (the king) did not look into these great dástáns. The fault lay with the evil tongue and my evil fortune."

These are repeated in the *Hajw* (Satire) which further contains the following :—

Badandish kish rūz-é niki mabād,
Sukhunha-é nikam bibad kard yād.

---

* Thus the great poet Qaani:—
Gih kunad Firdousi-e jirdous fikrat-ra ghamin,
Ta maran Maimandi-e napak-ra shadan kunad.
"At times it (the sky) makes miserable Firdousi of heavenly imagination in order that it may gladden the heart of the impious Maimandi."

Ahmed B. Hassan al-Maimandi, entitled Shams-al-Kufat, was for twenty years minister of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi and his son Masud. As it is stated that he caused all official documents to be written in Arabic instead of Persian, as had been the practice before his time, he cannot be suspected of any particular pro-Iranian proclivities. He died in A. H. 424 A. D. 1030.

Baré Padsheh paykaram zisht kard,
Furuzinda akhtar chun angisht kard.

"A miscreant,—may he never see a good day—represented my noble verses as wicked. He painted me black in the eye of the king, and made my shining star like dead coal."

The omission to mention by name this traducer even in the Satire is rather mysterious. It is curious that the poet, who was not afraid to defy and defame a jealous and all-powerful tyrant like Mahmūd, should have hesitated to denounce by name and description an inferior personage who turned the king against him. He was no doubt a man in high place; but the highest in the land did not daunt the spirit of the brave, old minstrel. It is difficult to ascribe Firdousi's silence in this respect merely to fear. Who was he?

PROFESSION.

There is no allusion anywhere throughout the poem to any trade or profession for which Firdousi was trained, or to any office that he ever held. From the manner in which he glorifies the office of *dabīr* or scribe, there is something to be said about Warner's conjecture, that he, or his son, or both were educated for the office of the scribe. "Of all professions it is the most esteemed, exalting even those of lowly birth." Among the advantages enumerated by the great Búzarjamihr is the significant one of its affording a direct access to the court and royal presence. Throughout the Shahnama the *navīsandeh* or scribe is shown as really indispensable for affairs of state.

LAND-HOLDER.

There is little doubt that Firdousi owned land and derived a somewhat precarious livelihood from its produce. If the harvest failed owing to climatic conditions he was faced with starvation. In one or two significant passages he alludes to the plight to which he is likely to be reduced by a failure of the season:

Tagarg āmad imsāl bar sān-é marg,
Magar marg bihtar azin sān tagarg.
Namāndam namaksūd-u hizum, na jav,
Na chizi padidast ta jav derav.

"A deadly hail descended this year; perhaps death is preferable to this kind of hail. I have no salted meat, fuel, nor barley left. There is nought to be had until harvest-time."

That he was in indigent poverty and probably in debt, especially in his later days, is also clear from statements like the following:

Mara dakhl-u kharj ar barābar budi,
Zamāna mara chun birādar budi.

"If my expenditure and income were equal, Time would have been like a brother to me."

Mabāda ki dar dihr diristi,
Musibat buvad piri-u nisti.
Mara nist in khurram ānra ki hast,
Bibakhshāy bar mardum-é tang-dast.

"May you not live too long in this world. Old age and indigence are a real calamity."
"I have none of these good things (bread, wine and sweets). Have pity upon those who are indigent."

He was also in constant dread of land taxes.

Bidin tiragi rūzu houl-é kharāj,
Zamin gashta az barf chūn gūy-é āj
Man andar chunin rūz-u chandin nayāz,
Biandisha dar gashta fikram darāz.
Hama kārha shud sar andar nashib
Magar dast girad Husain-é Qatib.

"The weather is bleak and dark and there is the dread of the taxes. The earth white with snow, looks like a ball of ivory. I am in such a dark day and in such indigence, and long I ruminate upon my anxious thoughts. All my affairs have been overturned and have become topsy-turvy—unless Husain-i-Qatīb should succour me."

ALLUSIONS TO AGE.

There are numerous passages in the Shahnama at fairly frequent intervals in which the poet alludes to the rapid flight of time. Nothing seems to have oppressed his mind so much as the evanescence of life and certainty of death. In almost every personal reference to himself he notes with

regret the fleeting years, and deplores the flight of youth, and the steady inexorable approach of old age.

Firdousi gives his age at various stages in the course of the Shahnama. It ranges from 58 to 76 and "nearly 80". But he is apparently much younger when composing some of his great dāstāns, e.g. Bezhun. His friend who persuaded him to embark upon the great undertaking points out that he has the inestimable advantage of youth:

Gushāda zabān-u jawāṇit hast,
Sukhun guftan-é pahlwānit hast,
Tu in nāma-é khusravān bāz gūy,
Bidān jūy nazd-é mihān ābrūy.

"You have an eloquent tongue and youth and the power of heroic utterance. Do you recount this story of the Kings, and thereby seek honour before the great."

It may be interesting to cite here a few of the verses in which he mentions his age.

Thus 58, which seems to have been the turning-point in his life, is mentioned several times:

Chu bar dāshtam jāṃ-é panjāh-u hasht,
Nagiram juz as yād-é taboot-u dasht.

* * * * *

Azān pas ki binmūd panjāh-u hasht,
Bisar bar firawān shigifti guzasht.

* * * * *

Bidāngeh ki bud sāl panjāh-u hasht,
Jawān būdam-u ān jawāni guzasht.

"Now that I have raised the cup of 58, I can only think of the coffin and the grave."

* * * * *

"After 58 has been shown to me and various wonders have passed over my head."

* * * * *

"When my years were at 58 I still felt young, and now even that youthfulness has gone!"

Next we have several verses alluding to his reaching or crossing the age of sixty:

Chu āmad bi nazdik-é sar tigh-é shast,
Madih may ki az sāl shud mard mast.

* * * * *

Girāyanda du tīz pāy-é nevand,
Hamāṇ shast-é bad-khwāh kardash biband.
Kasi-ra ki sālash bi dusi rasid,
Umid az jehānash bibāyad burid.

* * * * *

Mara umr bar shast shud sāliyān,
Biranj-u bisakhti bibastam mayān

"When the sword of 60 has come near one's head, please do not deal out wine any more, for one has become dead drunk with age."

* * * * *

"This accursed 60 has fettered fast my two swift, free-moving legs."

"He whose years have reached twice thirty must have all hope of worldly happiness cut off."

* * * * *

"My age has gone beyond 60, and I have to bind up my waist in (to undergo) toil and trouble."

* * * * *

Then we have mention of sixty-one:

Chu sālat shud ay pīr bar shast-u yak,
May-u jām-u ārāṃ shud binamak.

"O thou old man, when thy years have reached 61, the wine, the cup, and all enjoyment lose their salt and savour."

Sixty-two is mentioned in one of his lyrics:

Bichandin hunar shast-u du sāl būdam,
Ki tusha baram zāshkār-u nihāni.

"I spent 62 years in acquiring all these accomplishments, so that I might derive benefit from the overt and the hidden."

Next sixty-three:

Chu shast-u seh sālam shud-u gūsh ker,
Zi giti chira jūyam āieen-u farr?

* * * * *

Aya shast-u seh sāleh mard-é kuhan,
Tu az bāda ta chand rạ̄ni sukhun?

"When I have become 63 years old and deaf, why should I yearn for the pride and pomp of the world?"

* * * * *

"Oh thou sixty-three years old man! How long will you go on discoursing on wine?"

Then in several painful lines he refers to sixty-five, the year in which he lost his only son:

Chu sạ̄li guzasht az baram shast-u panj,
Fuzun kardam andisha-é dard-u ranj.

* * * * *

Chu panj az bar-é sal-é shastam guzasht,
Bidạ̄n sān ki bād-é bahāri bidasht.

* * * * *

Chunin sāl bugzạ̄shtam shast-u panj,
Bidarvishi-u tangdasti-u ranj.

* * * * *

Mara sāl bugzasht bar shast-u panj,
Na niku buvad gar biyạ̄zam biganj.

"When the year 65 passed over me the thought of pain and sorrow deepened within me."

* * * * *

"Since 5 years have passed over my 60 as swiftly as the spring breezes in the forest."

* * * * *

"Thus have I spent 65 years in poverty, indigence, and drugery."

* * * * *

"I have now gone beyond 65. It does not behove me to yearn for gold and wealth."

Sixty-six is also mentioned:

Man az shast-u shish sust gashtam chu mast,
Bijạ̄y-é anānam asa shud bidast.

* * * * *

Harān geh ki shud sạ̄l bar shast-u shish,
Na niku buvad mardum-é kina-kesh.

"By this sixty-six I have grown drowsy like a drunkan man; and in place of the smart reins of youth I hold now the slow, stiff staff of age."

* * * * *

"When the years have reached sixty-six it is not meet for a man to be revengeful."

Right at the end of the great poem he refers to his age as Seventy-one:

Chu sāl andar āmad bihaftād-u yak,
Hami zīr-é shi'ar andar āmad falak.

"When my years reached seventy-one the Heavens themselves fell under my lofty rhyme."

Only in one manuscript copy of the Shahnama (Leyden) we have Seventy-six mentioned:

Kanun sālam āmad bihaftād-u shish,
Ghanuda hami chashm maysār fash.

"Now my years have reached seventy-six, and the eye is drooping like a drunken man's" (The meaning of *maysār fash* or *mayshar fash* is not clear, and the expression is obscure.)*

In the same context he describes himself as near eighty years of age:

Kanun umr nazdik-é hashtād shud,
Umidam biyakbāra barbād shud.

"Now my age is nearly eighty, and all my hopes have been altogether blasted."

The haphazard and disorderly mention of his age at various stages of the Shahnama clearly indicates that the epic was not begun at the beginning and carried on in regular chronological order from start to finish. On the contrary, it shows that different portions of the poem were composed at different times, and subsequently arranged in chronological order of the history.

The passage of time fills him with a great fear lest his life's work may remain unfinished; and he prays to God to spare him a few years more:

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* Perhaps the correct reading is "Ghanuda hami chashm maykhar wash."

Hami khwāham az Dāvar-é Kirdigār,
Ki chandąn amān yābam az ruzgār,
Kizin nāmwar nąma-é bāstān,
Bimanam bigiti yaki dāstān,
Ki har kas ki andar sukhun dąd dād
Zi man juz bi niki nayārad biyād.

"To the just God I pray with humble heart,
That still stern time may spare my life so far,
That I may live to lay behind me here
On earth, a memorial by this famous book.
So that whoever judges fair of poetry,
May not remember me except in praise."

So much is the poet oppressed with the idea of life's vanity and youth's rapid flight, that any expression of hilarious and wholehearted enjoyment is rare. The prevailing tone of his ruminations on life is depressed and melancholy. He first mentions his age in the story of Siāwush. Then he takes us into his confidence in the beginning of the adventure of Bezhun. There he does not mention his age, (in all probability this episode was composed very early) but talks of love and wine and introduces us to his sweetheart who sings to him the romantic story. Then he passes on to Gūdarz and Pírān, at the end of which occurs that long passage in praise of the Sultan, in which he says the finest things imaginable about his patron; and there he again mentions his age. He is now sixty-six. He bewails his lot and fondly remembers that he was comparatively young even at 58! And that too had gone!

Manaz shast-u shish sust gashtam chu mast,
Bijāy-é anąnam asa shud bidast.
Rukh-é lālagun gasht bar sąn-é māh,
Chu kafur shud rang-é rish-é siyąh
Zi piri khum āwurd bālāy-é rast,
Hamaz nargisān roushnāi bikāst.
Bidąngih ki bud sāl panjāh-u hasht,
Jawān būdam-u ān jawąni guzasht.

"This sixty-six has made me weak, as though
Wine-drunk I were. In place of youth's smart reins
I take in hand the stiff slow staff of age.
My fresh red tulip-face has grown, alas!

Pale like the moon; and comphor-white the beard.
The stature, straight and tall, is bent with age.
The light has lessened from the nargis-eye.
At fifty-eight I was still young; and now
That youth again is past."

BODILY FEATURES.

The allusion to his bodily features in this passage raises the most interesting question of Firdousi's personal appearance. Of this unfortunately we have no record. No contemporary or subsequent writer or painter has left any portrait of the poet. The pictures broadcast during the millenary celebrations in Iran were imaginary. We may infer from the above passage and other passages in the Shahnama, that he had a straight manly figure, and a rich full-blooded complexion. He had also a beard.

He must have indeed had in youth a magnificent stature, complexion, eyes and teeth, for he again and again bewails the ravages of time upon these, and fondly remembers what he was when young.

"I have been thus enfeebled by the might of sixty (attack of old age). Avoid it and have nothing to do with it. It (old age) makes the magnificent cypress (straight stature) crooked, and the jessamine leaf (complexion) of the colour of amber (sallow). The ruddy rose (cheek) is turned into saffron hue, and this saffron colour brings in its wake heavy woes. The free swift foot becomes fettered without bonds, and the precious body becomes wretched and miserable. My pure pearls (teeth) have become weak and loose and the straight cypress has bent low. These sad eyes have taken to weeping and are moist with pain and weakness. The glad and joyous heart is filled with pain. Ah, even thus have my days become niggardly and heartless."

At the end of the reign of Kay-Khusrav he reverts to the praises of the king; but his tone is no longer confident and hopeful. It is hesitating and suppliant:

"By the victorious fortune of the King—
From whom flow hope and fear and injury—
Oh may his heart relent towards this old man!"

From this point onwards a reference to the Sultan is generally accompanied with the thought, evidently born of his wish that, dirams and dināŕs are quite worthless in the eye of the king, and he scatters them as freely as the heads of his enemies. It is obvious from the iteration that he was anything but easy about Mahmúd's parting with the promised or expected guerdon of gold.

Chronicling the history of the Sāssānians Firdousi appears tired and depressed at various stages. He has to some extent lost his original zest for the work, and occasionally he even feels diffident about his powers. Thus

Kanun gar kunad maghzam andisha gird.
Bigūyam jehān justan-é Yazdegird.

"Now if my brain is able to gather together its thoughts I shall tell you the story of Yezdegird's campaigns."

Contrast this with the abounding confidence in himself when his mind was overflowing with great ideas, and he launched upon the great adventure:

Mara akhtar-é khufta bidār gasht,
Bi maghz andar andisha bisyār gasht.

"My sleeping star awoke and my mind was teeming with ideas."

Similarly in other places he expresses a feeling of weariness at the heavy burden of his task, and breathes a sigh of relief when he finishes a chapter. Thus:

Chu in kār-é dilgirat āmad bibun
Zi shatranj bāyad ki rāni sukhun.

"Since this heavy-hearted task is finished you must now tell the story of the game of chess."

Kanun pādshāhi-é shāh Ardashir,
Bigúyam ki pish-amadam nāguzir.

"Now I shall describe the reign of King Ardashir, since willy-nilly it has come upon me."

On completing the history of Búzurjamihr he renders thanks to the Creator:

Sipās az Khūdāvand-é Khurshid-u māh,
Ki rastam zi Buzarjamihr-u zi Shah.

"Praise be to the Lord of the Sun and the Moon, that at last I have escaped from Būzurjamihr and the King."

Life has lost its salt and savour and his spirit is bewildered and tormented by a sense of frustration and despair:

Chu sālat shud ay pir bar shast-u yak,
May-u jām-u ārām shud bi-namak.
Fusurda tan andar mayān-é gunah,
Ravān sūy-é firdous gum karda rāh.

"When you have passed the age of sixty-one, O thou old man, feasting and enjoyment have lost their salt and savour. This feeble frame is frozen in the iron grip of sin, and the soul has missed its way towards the abode of the blest."

In the autobiographical passages that remain the prevailing note is of sadness and trouble. Thus introducing the story of Rustam's death he says:—

Du gūsh-u du pāy-é man āhu gireft,
Tuhi-dasti-u sāl niru gireft.
Bibastam bidin gūna bad-khwāh bakht.
Binālam zi bakht-é bad-u sāl-é sakht.
"My ears and feet have grown infirm,
And age and empty-handedness wax strong.
Thus my malignant luck has bound me fast,
And sore I wail over my lucklessness
And stringent years."

He continues to the end in this strain. The King's praise, and complaint about poverty and age, constitute the staple of these personal passages. The heart-broken elegy upon his son's untimely death has already been quoted.

COMPOSITION OF THE SHAHNAMA.

Traditionally the composition of the Shahnama is linked with the name of Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazni. Firdousi has formally dedicated his great epic to this monarch:

Bidin nāma man dast kardam darāz,
Bināmé Shahinshāh-é gardan farāz.

"I have extended my hand towards this royal book in the name of the exalted monarch."

But the popular belief that Firdousi undertook the work at the express command of Sultan Mahmūd, and toiled at it for 30 or 35 years, to earn the promised reward of one gold dināŕ for every verse that he composed, seems to be erroneous; although it derives some support from stray utterances of the poet in the Shahnama and in the Satire. The legend about Firdousi leaving Toos while still a young man to escape the exactions of a local tyrant, his meeting the three court-poets in a public garden, and astonishing them by his learning and genius, and his introduction to the court by the poet-laureate Unsuri, cannot be historically supported. Probably all anecdotes that introduce him into Mahmūd's presence as an obscure youth, and make him embark upon the laborious work at the king's express orders are mythical. Dowlatshah makes him repair to Ghazni as a young rustic and start upon the great task by desire of Mahmūd. Lutf Ali Āzar, the author of *Atash-Kadah*, amplifies this and gives some picturesque circumstantial details of Firdousi's introduction to the Sultan and his embarking upon the great undertaking. On the other hand, Nizāmi Arūzi, who is a much older and certainly more reliable authority, makes Firdousi set out for Ghazni after practically finishing the poem. This latter version is more consistent with history and with the poet's own utterances.

The Shahnama, as noted above, was completed in A. H. 400 (A. D. 1010). He says in the *Hajv*, and elsewhere, that he was engaged upon it for about 30 to 35 years; so that he must have taken it up about 975 A. D. Now Sultan Mahmūd did not ascend the throne of his father Subuktagīn until 996 A. D. Firdousi would be well over 60 years of age by then; and he would have had composed considerable portions of the epic by that time. In his Preface he refers to the old Bāstan-Nāma, the original book or Chronicle of Kings, which is the source and basis of his Epic. Then he mentions the advent of Daqīqī who first undertook the task of versifying the ancient chronicle:

Jawāni biyāmad gushada zabān
Sukhun gūy-u khush taba'-u roushan rawān,
Binadhm āram in nāma-ra guft man,
Azān shādmān shud dil-é anjuman.

"There came a youth of fluent tongue, eloquent, good-natured and enlightened; 'I shall compose this history,' he declared, and the people's hearts rejoiced at this."
Daqiqi after writing about a thousand verses was murdered and left the work for his successor. Now Daqiqi died about 972 A. D. and Firdousi appears to have definitely resolved upon composing the Book of Kings about this times:—

Dil-é roushan-é man chu bugzasht azūy,
Suyé takht-é shāh-é jehān kard rūy.
Ki in nāma-ra dast pish āwuram,
Zi daftar biguftār-é khish āwuram.
Bipursidam az har kasi bishumār,
Bitarsidam az girdish-é ruzgār.
Magar khud dirangam nabāshad basi,
Bibāyad sipurdan bidigar kasi.
Bishihram yaki mihrbān dūst bud,
Tu gufti ki bāman biyak pūst bud.
Mara guft khūb āmad in rāy-é tu
Binīki girāyad magar pāy-é tu,
Nabishta man in nāma-é pahlavi
Bipish-é tu āram magar naghnavi.
Gushāda zabān-u jawānit hast.
Sukhun guftané pahalwānit hast.
Tu in nāma-é khusrawān bāz gūy,
Bidān jūy nazd-é mihān ābrūy.

"When my enlightened heart turned away from him (Daqiqi) I turned towards the throne of the ruler of the time, hoping to extend my hand towards this book and translate it from the ancient chronicle into my own speech. I constantly questioned everybody; I trembled at the instability of life lest I too should not be spared for long, and should have to resign this work to another. I had a dear friend in the city who was my intimate, as though, within one skin with me. He told me that this resolve of mine was good and that my feet were tending in the right direction. He added 'I shall bring to you the manuscript of this Pahlavi chronicle; You are young and you have a fluent tongue, and you can compose heroic poetry. Do you versify this Book of Kings and thereby acquire renown before the great.'"

For about 20 to 25 years after this he found no patron worthy of his work and he kept it to himself :

Wa digar ki ganjam wafādār nist,
Hamān ranj-ra kas kharidār nist.
Zamāna sarāi puraz jang būd.
Bigūyandigān bar jehān tang būd.
Barin gūna yak chand bugzāshtam,
Sukhun-ra nihufta hami dāshtam.
Nadidam kasi kish sazāwār būd,
Biguftār-é in mar mara yār būd,
Sukhun-ra nigeh dāshtam sāl bist,
Bidān ta sazāwār-é in ganj kist.

"And moreover fortune is not friendly and faithful to me. There is none to purchase and pay for this labour. It was an age of war and discord, and the world was hard upon poets and singers. Thus I lived for a while and kept my composition secret. I saw no one worthy of it, none to encourage and support me in my literary work. I kept to myself my poem for 20 years and waited to see who would be worthy of such a treasure."

Thus it is clear that Firdousi had large portions of the great epic ready composed and was for a number of years on the look-out for a patron to whom he might dedicate this work and obtain a suitable reward. On the other hand, it seems probable that he was waiting for definite support at the hands of a powerful patron, before he formally undertook the laborious task of systematically versifying the entire chronicles of old Iran. The prefatory portion of the Shahnama includes passages of high and hopeful praise of Sultan Mahmūd; and at intervals he interrupts the course of his narrative to flatter the monarch. It is unlikely that all these panegyrics were subsequently composed and inserted in various places. Again in the *Hajv* and elsewhere he insinuates that Mahmūd led him on to the task and made him toil for a long number of years. The truth probably lies midway. He must have composed several of the great *dāstāns* before ever he thought of Sultan Mahmūd. Thus the stories of Farídún, of Zál and Rudábah, of Rustam and Sohrāb, of Siāwush, and of Bezhun and Manijeh, were probably all of spontaneous composition. The heroic and romantic character of these episodes would

naturally attract an ardent poetic temperament like Firdousi's. No particular historical study or research was necessary for doing justice to such tales, and they could be undertaken off-hand by a powerful and exuberant genius. Besides, in all these *dāstāns* there is no reference to Mahmūd. In several of the important *dāstāns* Firdousi states either in the beginning or at the end the circumstances in which he composed them. He had the interesting habit of attaching short autobiographical prologues or epilogues to his *dāstāns*. We find such passages in the stories of Sohrab, Siawush and Bezhun. But in these there is not one word of reference to Mahmūd. It is hardly likely that Firdousi would make no allusion to so powerful and promising a patron in these great episodes, which constitute the glory of his epic. The story of Bezhun begins with a beautiful lyric passage in which the poet describes the source of his inspiration. But there is no mention of Mahmūd. Now take a similar prologue to the story of Rustam and Isfandiyār which, according to tradition, was the first composed by order of the king. This prologue also is a lyric gem. But after describing the glories of spring, by a clever turn or transition (technically called *gurīz* or "flight" in qasida poetry) which would excite the envy of the most adroit court-flatterer among the later poets, he at once passes on to praise the monarch :

Nakhandad zamin ta nagiryad hawa,
Hawāra nakhwānam kaf-é pādsha,
Ki bārān-é ou dar bahārạn buvad,
Na chun himmat-é shahryārān buvad.
Bikhurshid mānad hami dast-é Shah
Chu andar hamal bar farāzed kulāh.
"Laughs not the land until the weather weeps :—
I call it not my royal patron's palm:
It sheds its showers only in the Spring,
And not perennial like the grace of kings.
The royal hand resembles Spring's fair sun
When he puts on his crown in Aries."

But apart from these great *dāstāns* in the first half of the Shahnama, the later historical portion was probably composed after he had received promise of support from Mahmūd. It would seem that the poet systematically set himself to compose

and complete the history of Iran after Mahmūd had formally extended his patronage.* He arranged it chronologically, composed the prefatory matter, and supplied the connecting links. Perhaps the greater part of Sassanian history is of later composition. At various points in the account of Sassanian kings he gives his age as 63 or 65. It has more historical than poetical value, and it must have cost immense labour. Firdousi never disregarded historical material where it existed. He waded through a mass of chronicles before he felt justified in versifying the annals of the Sassanians. He had probably a freer hand in dealing with the history of the earlier Pishdādians and Kayānians. For a time he seems to have wandered at his own sweet will over the whole field of adventure and romance. The poem was not conceived as a whole like the great epics of Dante and Milton. In fact it is not a unity, like the Iliad or Odyssey, but a series of epopees. Nor does it show, as in the case of Shakespeare, any traces of a gradual growth and development of the poet's mind and art. There is undoubtedly a great disparity between various portions of the Shahnama. In long and numerous passages he is dull and languid. But all the while we feel that his power is unimpaired though dormant; and it bursts forth suddenly in a magnificent line. The presence of this power and mastery is felt everywhere, in the beginning, in the middle, in the end. There are weak lines and plenty of tedious passages. But nowhere in the whole of this gigantic poem is there any evidence of immaturity, of experimentation, of dotage. He started on his work in the full maturity of his faculties, and was all the while that he carried it on in the equable noontide of his powers. The health and vigour of his mind seem to have been wonderful. The final passages in which he bewails the plight of his country after its subjugation by the Arabs are of matchless power and beauty. And we are simply amazed at the force, fire and easy mastery over thought and language, which he displays in the Satire on Sultan Mahmud written when he was nearly 80.

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* It is probable that the opening portion of the Shahnama from Kayumarth to Jamshid was also composed much later in life, so as to complete and round off the national history. Towards the end of the reign of Jamshid he says:

Dikam sir shud zin saray-e sipanj
Khudaya mara zud birhan zi ranj.

"I am satiated with and weary of this world. O Lord, deliver me soon from this toil.

LAST DAYS AND DEATH

These appear to be the main points and circumstances regarding his life alluded to by the poet himself in the Shahnama. For the rest his life is merged in the great work to which he dedicated it. The completion of his labours about 1010 A. D. is followed close by the well-known story of his disappointment, his wanderings, and his tremendous retaliation. The story of his end is generally embellished with many picturesque and pathetic ancedotes.

According to Nizāmi Arūzi Mahmūd sent only 20,000 dirhems to Firdousi for his poem, which the poet considered so contemptible that he divided the sum between the keeper of the bath where he was at the time the money was brought, and a sherbet-seller. Another tradition says that Mahmūd sent 60,000 silver dirhems instead of 60,000 gold dinárs which the poet had expected (one gold dinar for each verse); and the poet felt so hurt and disappointed that he gave away 20,000 dirhems to the slave who brought the money, 20,000 to the bath-keeper, and the remaining 20,000 to a fuqa'-seller from whom he took a cup of the beverage. This tradition about the poet having given away the money, (whatever it was), sent by the Sultán is very ancient, and finds support in certain verses of the Satire :

Bipādāsh ganj-é mara dar gushād,
Biman juz bahā-é fuqāi nadād.
Fuqāi nayarzidam az ganj-é shah,
Azān man fuqāi kharidam birāh.

"He (the Sultan) made me open the treasure-house of my genius with the promise of a reward; but he gave me nothing except the price of a drink of Fuqa'. All I merited from the King's bounty was a cup of Fuqa', and so I purchased a drink of Fuqa' by the way-side."

When Sultán Mahmūd heard about the manner in which Firdousi had slighted his bounty, he became very angry and ordered that the poet should be trampled to death under the feet of an elephant. This circumstance is also alluded to in the Satire :

Mara sahm dādi ki dar pāy-é pil,
Tanat-ra bisāyam chu daryā-é nil.

"You threatened me that you would reduce my body to pulp like the blue waters under the feet of an elephant."

The poet is then said to have written this celebrated Satire in the course of a single night and fled from Ghazni to Herāt. In Herāt he remained concealed in the shop of the poet Azraqi's father, Ismail Warrāq, the book-seller, until Mahmūd's emissaries, who were searching for the poet everywhere, returned from Toos to Ghazni. Firdousi then went to Toos, and from there to Tabaristán, and took refuge with Sepahbud Shahryār, who traced his descent from Yezdegird Shahryār.

According to Nizāmi, it was here that Firdousi wrote the Satire consisting of about 100 lines; and further told Shahryār that he was dedicating the Shahnama to him, since it was a history of his ancestors. But Shahryār, who was apparently afraid of Sultán Mahmūd, dissuaded the poet from this course, and requested that the Satire should be sold to him for 100,000 dirhems—a thousand dirhems for each verse. So, says Nizāmi, the Satire, which was inserted in the Preface, was expunged and destroyed, and only the following six verses remained :

Mara ghamza kardand kān pur sukhun,
Bimihr-é Nabi-u Ali shud kuhun.
Gar az mihr-é shān man hikāyat kunam,
Chu Mahmūd sad-ra himāyat kunam.
Parastārzāda nayāyad bikār,
Agar chand bāshad pidar shahryār.
Azin dar sukhun chand rānam hami,
Chu darya kirāna nadānam hami.
Biniki nabud Shah-ra dastgāh.
Wagarna marā bar nishāndi bigāh.
Chu andar tubārash buzurgi nabūd,
Nayārust nām-é buzurgān shanūd.

But whatever the arrangement between Firdousi and Shahryār, the statement that only six verses survived is not correct; for the Satire has come down to us practically intact, and its genuineness cannot be questioned, although here as elsewhere the text is corrupted by spurious verses, and several of the verses are also found scattered in the body of the epic. It was apparently well-known even during Firdousi's life-

time.* According to a very ancient tradition, wandering in the streets of his native town, old, worn out, neglected, in poverty and distress, the octogenerian poet overheard a child sing these famous verses from the Satire :

Agar Shah-ra shah būdi pidar,
Bisar bar nihādi mara tāj-é zar,
Wagar mādar-é Shah bānu budi,
Mara sim-u zar ta bizānu budi.

"If the father of the ruler were of royal birth, he would have placed a crown of gold upon my head. If the King's mother too were a lady born, I should have had gold and silver heaped up to my knees around me."

The verses once again put the poet in mind of his grievous disappointment, he felt a great grief, swooned on the spot, and died.

The revulsion of feeling in favour of Firdousi on the part of Sultan Mahmūd is attributed to an incident which occurred during the monarch's march to Ghazni from one of his Indian expeditions. A rebel chief, in the security of his stronghold, was disposed to be recalcitrant towards the Sultan's call to obedience. Mahmūd was discussing with his counsellors the terms of a peremptory ultimatum which would convey to the rebel the urgency of the situation. The minister in attendance suggested this strong simple line from the Shahnama :—

Agar juz bikām-é man āyad jawāb
Man-u gurz-u maidān-u Afrāsiyāb.
"And should the reply with my wish not accord,
Then Afrāsiyāb's field and the mace and the sword."—
Browne.

The powerful rigour, Noldeke rightly observes, of this verse cannot be rendered by any translation.

"Whose verse is that?" inquired Mahmūd. "For he must have the heart of a man." "Poor Abul-Qāsim Firdousi composed it," answered the minister, "he who laboured for five and twenty years and reaped no advantage from his work." The Sultan is then said to have felt remorse for his treatment

* Dowlatshah remarks that the Satire is so immensely famous that it is not necessary to quote it in full.

of the great poet and asked the minister to remind him on their arrival at Ghazni.

"So when the Sultan returned to Ghazni," continues Nizāmi Arūzi in his *Chahār Maqāla*, "the minister reminded him, and Mahmūd ordered that sixty thousand dinars' worth of indigo should be sent to Firdousi; and that it should be carried to Toos on the Sultan's own camels, and that apologies should be tendered to Firdousi. For years the minister had been working for this, and at length he had achieved his aim. So now he caused the camels to be loaded and the indigo safely reached Tabaran (a district of Toos). But even as the camels entered the Rudbár Gate, the corpse of Firdousi was borne forth from the Gate of Razān. Now at that time there was in Tabaran a preacher, whose fanaticism was such that he declared that he would not suffer Firdousi's body to be buried in the Mussalman cemetery, because he was a Rāfizi (heretic); and nothing that men could say would serve to move him. Now, outside the gate there was a garden belonging to Firdousi, and there they buried him. And there he lies to this day. And I visited his tomb in the year A.H. 510 (A.D. 1116-1117)." *

The date of Firdousi's death according to the *Tārikh-e-Guzida* is A. H. 416 (A. D. 1025-26); whereas according to Dowlatshah it is A.H. 421 (A.D. 1030). The latter authority adds "his tomb is in the city of Toos in the vicinity of the Abbāsiya Mausoleum. And his blessed tomb is still known; and pilgrims (admirers) resort thither in large numbers."

The author of the *Chahār Maqāla* proceeds to say that the King's gift was offered to a daughter left by the poet, but she would not accept it saying she needed it not. The money was therefore expended in repairing the rest-house of Cháha which, in Nizāmi's day, stood on the road between Merv and Nishāpur at the confines of Toos. In Bāisangharkhan's Preface it is said that the money was spent on a dyke which became known as Band-i-Aisha.

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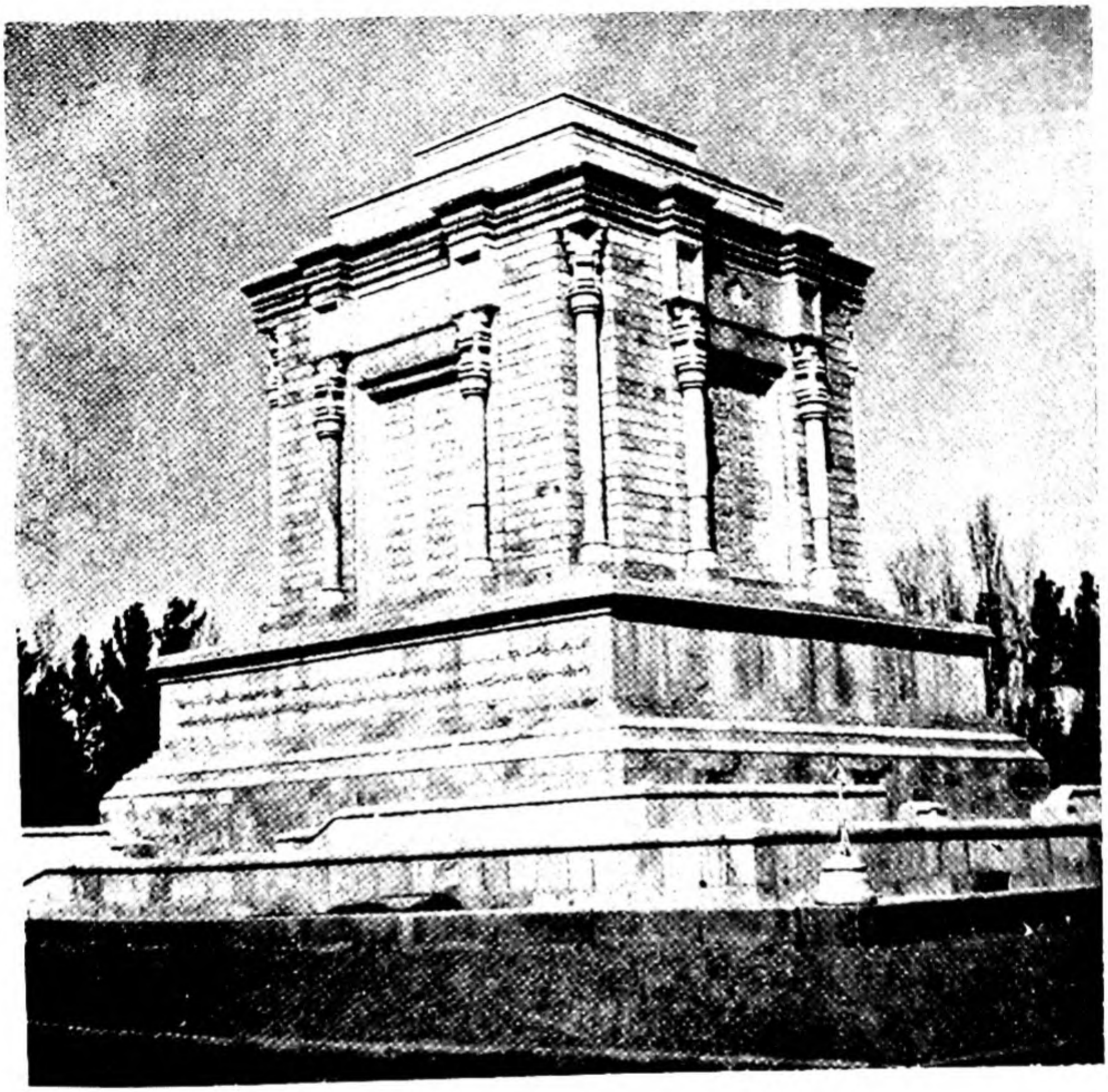
* Zhukowsky claimed to have discovered Firdousi's tomb in the vicinity of Meshhed; and Sykes and Jackson also explored the region for identifying the resting-place of the great Poet. Till the middle of 19th century Firdousi's tomb was traditionally known; for it was shown to Fraser in A. H. 1236. The splendid memorial at Toos erected by the orders of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1934 is generally believed to mark the exact spot where the mortal remains of the immortal bard were buried nearly a thousand years ago.



Firdousi Memorial at Toos, erected by H. I. M. Reza Shah Pahalvi.

CHAPTER III

ANECDOTES

The story of Firdousi's life is usually supplemented and embellished by a number of anecdotes. Their historical value is doubtful. But many of them are derived from very ancient sources, and at least serve to illustrate the esteem in which he came to be held by his countrymen almost from the first. Dowlatshah in his notice of the poet attributes his pre-eminence in the realm of poetry to divine guidance and inspiration. It is noteworthy that, as in the case of saints and prophets, anecdotes about Firdousi begin before his birth and continue after his death. Thus we are told that shortly before Firdousi's birth, his father dreamt that his son took his stand upon a high tower, shouted loud and clear in all directions, and received answering applause from the four corners of the world. This dream, it is said, was interpreted by Shaikh Najībuddin Muábbar (interpreter of dreams), who assured the anxious father that his son would live to achieve world-wide fame.

When Firdousi set out for Ghazni, we are told by several of his biographers, one of his first adventures was to meet the three court-poets of Sultan Mahmūd, Unsuri, Asjadi, and Farrukhi, in a public garden. It is said that on observing Firdousi's approach, the trio not desiring any intrusion, decided to avoid him by the most courteous method possible. So when Firdousi greeted them, Unsuri told him that they were the king's poets and did not admit any but poets into their company. Firdousi humbly submitted that he too had some pretensions that way; upon which Unsuri rejoined that they would be glad to entertain him should he demonstrate his powers by completing a quartette, the first three verses of which would be composed, one each, by himself and his two friends. Firdousi consented, and Unsuri at once began :

Chun ārez-é tu māh nabāshad roushan.
"The moon is not so bright as thy face".

followed by Asjadi :

Mānand-é rukhat gul nabuvad dar gulshan.
"There is no rose in the garden as beautiful as thy cheek."

And Farrukhi :

Muzhgānat guzar hami kunad az joushan.
"Your eyelashes can pierce even a coat of mail."

Now, it is stated, that the rhyme chosen was purposely such as would make the finding of a fourth rhyming word difficult if not impossible. But to the surprise of the all-too confident poets Firdousi at once struck in with

Mānand-é sinān-é Giv dar jang-é Pashan.
"Even like the spear of Giv in the field of Pashan." The court-poets were astonished. They were beaten with their own weapons. With all their learning they had never heard of the battle of Pashan. If the anecdote is genuine (which is extremely doubtful, the rhyme for one thing being not so impossible), * it is interesting to note how full the poet's mind was of the history of the past, and how his imagination naturally inclined towards the stories of the ancient heroes. All the four verses are poor. But, while there is nothing except the worn-out twaddle about faces like the moon, and cheeks like the rose, and eye-lashes like arrows, in the first three verses, the historical allusion lends distinction and dignity to the fourth, which indeed is quite apposite in relation to the preceding verse.

Next we have stories about Firdousi's early triumphs at the court of Sultan Mahmūd. It is said that on one occasion the king was so delighted with the poet's eloquence and improvisation that he exclaimed in rapture : "*Aya Firdousi ki majlis-i márá chun Firdous munavvar sákhti?*

"Are you from Firdous (paradise) that you have brightened our court like paradise?" This is stated to be the occasion of his assuming "Firdousi" as his pen-name.

On another occasion we are told that the poet's enviers and detractors represented to Mahmūd that the stories of the Shahnama appealed to the people, not so much on account of the poet's skill, as on account of the romantic and heroic

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* (1) Some critics have pointed out that the four poets were not such exact contemporaries as to make it possibile for them to have been in Ghazni at the time alleged.

(2) The Shahnama itself has the word Pashan rhyming with *kashan*.
Yaki sarv bud sabz-u bargash kashan,
Bar-u shakh chun razmgah-e Pashan.

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nature of the stories themselves. The Sultan, in order to test Firdousi's powers, commanded him to versify the simple story of Rustam's fight with Ashkabūs, in which Rustam throws a single arrow at his opponent and kills him. The passage describing this single action is among the most famous in Iranian poetry :

Rustam asked Toos to keep order at the centre of the army, saying that he himself would proceed on foot to give battle to Ashkabús. He then thundered at Ashkabūs :

"O thou fighting champion ! Thy equal and opponent has arrived; do not go from here."

The Kushán warrior smiled and was amazed. He drew in his reins and shouted to Rustam scoffingly, "Tell me your name, so that I may know who will have to wail over your headless trunk." Rustam replied "O thou accursed man! What need is there to ask for my name in this assemblage? My mother named me 'Thy Death,' and Time has made me the hammer for thy helmet."

Tahamtan bidu guft kay shūmtan,
Ché pursi tu nāmam darin anjuman.
Mara mām-é mān nam marg-é tu kard,
Zamāna mara putk-é targ-é tu kard.

The Kusháni then said, "Without your horse, you are simply giving away your body to certain death." Then Rustam answered, "O you vain talker and boaster! You have not seen how to make battle on foot and mow down the heads of proud warriors. Toos has sent me to do battle on foot, in order that I might wrest a horse from Ashkabūs." The Kusháni remarked that Rustam appeared to have no arms but jesting and jugglery. Rustam then shot an arrow at the horse of Ashkabús and laid him low. Then Ashkabūs, his body trembling and his face of deadly pallor, drew his bow, and rained his shafts upon Rustam. Rustam laughed at his efforts and observed: "Why do you give fruitless trouble to your malignant arms and soul?" Then Rustam selected one hard arrow from his belt. He rubbed with his hands and bent the Chachi bow, inserted his thumb in the tough stag-hide. He straightened his left arm, and curved his right,

and a whistling sound arose from the curve of the Chāchi bow. When the notch of the arrow reached his ear, a twanging sound came from the stag-hide. When the point kissed his finger-tips it passed over the knuckles of his back-hand. 'He shot it straight against the breast of Ashkabūs. Low stooped the sky and kissed the hero's hand. "Take," quoth Fate, and "Give," said Destiny. "Well done!" shouted the heavens, and "Bravo!" said the angels in answering applause. The Kushán warrior dropped down dead the very instant;—you might say he never was born of his mother :'

Bimālid chāchi kamān-ra bidast,
Bicharm-é gawazn andar āwurd shast;
Satūn kard chapra wa khum kard rāst,
Khurūsh az khum-é charkh-é chāchi bikhāst.
Chu sūfārash āmad bipahnāy-é gūsh,
Zi charm-é gawazn andar āmad kharūsh.
Chu paykān bibūsid sarangusht-é ouy.
Guzar kard az muhra-é shust-é ouy.
Bizad tir bar sina-é Ashkabūs
Sipihr ān zamān dast-é ou dād būs.
Qaza guft gīr-u qadar guft dih,
Falak guft ahsan malak guft zih.
Kushāni ham andar zamān jān bidad
Tu gufti ki hargiz zi mādar nazād.

"These few verses," exclaimed Mahmūd in rapture, "are worth all the treasures hoarded by Rustam in Kábulistán and Zábulistán with the might of his arm." Long and loud did the king, courtiers and poet talk of Rustam's doughty deeds that evening. When night came and all retired to rest, Firdousi dreamt that he saw Rustam in full armour coming towards him, with a tremendous bow in his hand, even as he had described him. The poet saluted him. The warrior greeted him warmly, and then with tears addressed the poet thus: "I wish, great man, to express my obligation to you for what you have done for me. But I am dead and powerless. I cannot give you anything. But once I wrenched some heavy rings of gold from the neck of an enemy, which I have buried in a certain spot. Take them out and keep them for my sake." He then gave directions about the spot, shot his

arrow towards it and vanished. In the morning when the poet awoke he felt convinced of the truth of the vision; but he dared not speak about it to anybody. However, sometime later, he happened, while travelling in the king's retinue, to pass by the spot indicated in the dream; and mentioning the circumstances to his friend Ayáz, the place was dug up. After some search several huge rings of red gold were found. The matter was reported to Mahmūd who was lost in wonder and bestowed the rings on Firdousi. The latter in spite of his own poverty requested the king to divide the treasure among all the poets.

Khwája Ali says in reference to this anecdote:

Ay rūzgār az ché sabab bimurawwat and,
In sarwarān-é dihr bidour-é zamān-é ma?
Rustam ki dar nibard bigufti ki as sharaf
Bahrām būsa dād rikāb-u anan-e ma,
Yak shab bikhwab guft bi Firdousi ay aziz,
Dar band-é haq guzārdan-é tust jān-é ma.
Amāda-u nihąda fulān ja dafinai,
Az sai-é gurz-u khanjar-é giti sitān-é ma.
Bardār ząn ki dast-ras-é ma digar namānd
Harchand sharmsār buvad zān rawān-é ma.
Az murdigąn hikayat-é ihsān chunin kunand.

"O Time! why are the rulers of the world so mean and ungenerous in our day? Rustam—who used to boast that owing to his prowess in battle Mars himself stooped low to kiss his reins and spurs—said one night to Firdousi in dream, 'O great man, I am constantly worried as to how I should discharge my obligation to you. Well, there is a treasure acquired by the power of my world-conquering mace and poniard in a particular spot. Go and take it; for I have no other resource left, however much I feel ashamed of it.' Such are the stories of the gratitude of the dead!"

There are other dream stories connected with Firdousi's life. A person saw the poet in dream writing the Shahnama. Suddenly he saw an angel descend from above, and, standing hehind the poet, guide his right hand as he wrote. After some time the angel flew up again. The dreamer's curiosity was roused. He approached and looked

over the manuscript, and found that the poet had just written the famous verse in which he appeals for universal humanity embracing even the meanest creatures—verses which drew the devout admiration of the great Sāādi:

Mayāzār mūri ki dané kashast,
Ki jān dārad-u jān-é shirin khush ast.

"Do not molest even the humble ant that drags the grain along the ground; for it has a soul and its sweet soul is dear to it."

Dowlatshah says (the fact is also mentioned by Nizāmi Arūzi) that on Firdousi's death Shaikh Abul Qasim Gurgani, the high-priest of Tabaran, refused to allow Firdousi's remains to be buried in the Mussalman cemetery, on the ground that he was not fit for such burial, having devoted his life to the celebration of infidel kings and warriors. That night (so runs the story) the Shaikh saw Firdousi in dream seated in paradise upon a resplendent throne, with a crown upon his head, surrounded by the kings and warriors he had immortalised. On being asked how he had attained to so high an estate, the poet replied that it was on account of a verse in which he had described the Divine Unity:

Jehān-ra bulandi-u pasti tui,
Nadānam ché-i harché hasti tui.

"Thou art the height and the depth of the world; I know not what Thou art; whatever Thou art, Thou art."*

This story, says Sir Gore Ouseley, was once being related at the court of Fath Ali Qājār, when Sir Gore was present. The latter expressed some scepticism about it, on the score that the verse itself was not to be found in the pages of the Shahnama. Upon which, he continues, a copy was sent for; and the king and the courtiers confidently ran over the pages containing the *Tawhid* or praise of God's unity in the commencement of the poem, expecting to find the verse there, and set the foreigner's doubts at rest. But in vain. The courtiers had to acknowledge their inability to support the immemorial tradition. However, in spite of Sir Gore

* The second verse of Nizami's Sikandar-nama is an echo of this verse of Firdousi:
Panah-e bulandi-u pasti tui,
Hama nistand anche hasti tui.

Ouseley and the stupid courtiers of Fath Ali Shah, the verse is genuine and can be seen in any copy of the Shahnama. Sir Gore and the courtiers failed to find it simply because they were looking for it in the wrong place. Anybody with a tolerable acquaintance with the Shahnama would know that verses in praise of the Divine Being are to be found in almost every chapter. The verse occurs in the account of Kay Khusrav's reign in the description of Rustam's battle with Khāqān-e-Chín.*

As may be naturally expected Firdousi himself had an implicit belief in dreams. He employs them as a species of Deus ex machina for the solution of many a situation, and some of his descriptions of dreams are striking and beautiful. Describing a famous dream of King Noushirwān he says:—

Magar khwāb-ra bihuda nashmuri,
Yaki bihra dānash zi payghambari.
Sitāra zanad rạ̄y ba charkh-u māh,
Sukhanha parāgandeh gardad birāh.
Ravānha-é roushan bibinad bikhwāb.
Hama budaniha chu ātash dar ạ̄b.

"Do not regard dreams as idle and meaningless. Regard them as a species of prophetic knowledge. The stars, the moon, and heavenly bodies confer among themselves, and their speeches scatter and spread. It is thus that enlightened souls see in dreams, as clearly as fire in water, all that is to happen."

Chapter IV

PREDECESSORS.

The most striking and perplexing fact in the history of Iranian literature is the apparent absence of literary ancestry for the birth of great poetry in the 10th century of the Christian era. The Sassanian Empire and Iranian culture came to an end by the middle of the 7th century. For nearly 300 years thereafter there is hardly any literary composition worth the name in Persian. Arabic is the language both of government and of belles letters; and the native tongue is despised and neglected in much the same way as Anglo-Saxon

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* This tradition is very ancient and the story is also told by the great Sufi poet Shaikh Fariduddin Attar in his "Israr-nama."

was in England after the Norman conquest. Nor does a single specimen of Sassanian poetry appear to have survived the catastrophe which overwhelmed Iran. The extant Pahlavi literature is almost entirely theological and liturgical, except one or two works like the *Kārnāmak* of Ardashir and the Yātkar-i-Zarīrān. There is not, and apparently there never was, any trace or tradition of ancient Persian poetry, except legends about the metrical efforts of Bahrām-Gūr and the minstrelsy of Bārbud in the time of Khusrav Parviz. There are similar legends about romances like *Wis-o-Ramin* and *Wāmiq-Adhra* existing in Pahlavi or Middle Persian. Curiously enough, Awfi and other old anthologists quote Bahrām Gūr's supposed Arabic verses; but of his Persian compositions not a single line has been preserved, except one solitary and obviously spurious verse, cited by both Awfi and Dowlatshah. Thus, until the end of the ninth century, Persian poetry presents a practically blank chapter. And yet before the next hundred years are out, we have not only the elaborate exercises of Rūdaki, Daqiqi, Unsuri and Farrukhi, but the miracle of the Shahnama itself! We have a literary language of matchless beauty and power, flexibility and finish, evolved out of—what? It is difficult to believe that the theological tracts, which are practically all the remnants we have today of the language and literature of Sassanian Iran, could be the direct progenitors of the immortal accents of Firdousi. What model, or, indeed, even what materials, had he on which to rear so mighty and majestic a structure? Granting that he was endowed with 'The vision and the faculty divine' in a supreme degree, still in the absence of a literary language he must lack the accomplishment of verse. Where did the early poets of Iran find that language? Could it be that, in point of fact, in the times of Bahrām Gūr, Noushirwán and Yezdegird, the Iranians spoke and wrote a more fluent and flexible idiom, and composed literary works of greater artistic merit, than the Pahlavi and Pázand literature which has come down to us warrants us in believing? If so, could it happen that they are all irretrievably lost? Nor is the problem solved by attributing this amazing outburst of the Iranian genius to the influence of Arabic. The Shahnama, the supreme effort of

that genius, is almost entirely of native inspiration in form, substance and spirit. The Arabs never had any epic poetry to speak of; and Firdousi's language is remarkable for a conscious and deliberate avoidance of the Arabic element to the utmost limit possible. He does not mention, as far as I am able to recollect, a single Arabic poet or historian in the course of his narrative. His sources are all indigenous.

Of his predecessors in the domain of Persian poetry too Firdousi mentions by name only Rūdaki and Daqiqi. Even his great contemporary, Unsuri, the poet-laureate of Sultan Mahmūd's court, although associated with him in anecdote, is not referred to in the Shahnama.*

The renaissance of modern Persian language and poetry is supposed to have begun in the reign of the Abbāside, Caliph, Al-Māmūn, the son and successor of Hāroun-al-Rashīd (813 to 833 A. D.) Until then Arabic was thc language of the Court and government. But the rigour of the prevailing fashion was relaxed by him, probably because of his pro-Persian proclivities, due to his mother having been of Iranian blood. Firdousi refers to Al-Māmūn thus:

Chu Māmun jehān roushan-u tāza kard.
Chunin nāma bar dīgar andāza kard.
Dil-é mūbedān dāsht-u rāy-é Kayąn
Bibasta bihar dānishi bar mayān,
Girānmąya Bu'l Fazl dastūr-é ouy,
Ki andar sukhun būd ganjūr-é ouy.
Bifarmūd ta pārsi-u dari,
Biguftand-u kutąh shud dāvari.

"When Māmún brightened and renovated the world, he transformed this book (Kalilah-Damna). He had the heart of Mūbeds and the intelligence of the Kayąnians; and he was

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* Dowlatshah in his account of Unsuri says, that Firdousi has praised Unsuri eloquently in the Shahnama, "as will be narrated in its proper place." But this statement is entirely unfounded, and he does not refer to it again anywhere. On the contrary, Baisungharkhan's Preface quotes certain verses attributed toFirdousi which are by no means complimentary to Unsuri:

"Begush az Surusham basi muzhdahast,
Dilam ganj-e gouhar zaban azhdahast.
Che sanjad bimizan-e man Unsuri?
Giya chun kashad pish-e gulbun sari?"

"My ears are filled with divine messages from Surush (the angel Gabriel) My heart is a treasure-house of precious gems, and my tongue has the power of the dragon. What can Unsuri weigh against me? How can a blade of grass raise its head before a rose?"

well equipped in all kinds of knowledge. Then the noble Abul Fazl, his minister, who in matters of letters was his treasurer, ordered that Persian and the native idiom should be spoken, and the controversy was ended."

The first man to compose verse in modern Persian is stated to have been a man named Abbāṣ of Merv, and several verses in praise of Al-Māmūn alleged to have been composed by him about 813 A. D., are quoted by Awfi. They contain several Arabic words, and some competent persons regard them as spurious. Better authenticated is the following anecdote about one Hanzala of Bádghis, who is mentioned both by Nizāmi Arūzi and Awfi among the earliest of Persian poets. About 875 A. D. Ahmed b-Abdulla Al-Khūjastani, who was originally an ass-herd, wrested Khorāsān from the successor of Yāqūb Leith. He was asked how he, an humble ass-herd, could aspire to become the Amir of Khorāsạn. He replied that the urge to high achievement came from two verses of Hanzala:—

Mihtari gar bikām-é shīrasti,
Shav khatar kun-zi kām-é shir bijūy.
Ya buzurgi-u nāz-u n'ạmat-u jāh,
Ya chu mardạnat marg rūya rūy.

"If greatness lies within the lion's jaws, go, face the peril and seize it even in the lion's mouth. Either achieve greatness and joy, riches and rank, or like a man face death without flinching."

Note the simple vigour of these verses in contrast with the atrificial ornateness of the verses attributed to Abbāṣ of Merv.

The same simplicity and directness is to be found in other early writers of the 9th century, like Shahīdi-é-Balkhi and Abu Shakūr of Balkh, to judge by specimens cited in the anthologies. The former wrote:—

Agar ghamra chu ātash dūd būdi,
Jehān tārik būdi jāwadané.
Darin giti sarāsar gar bigardi,
Khiradmandi nayạbi shādmāné.

"If sorrow emitted smoke like fire, the earth would for ever remain covered by a pall of darkness. Wander from

one end of the earth to the other; you will never come across a single sensible man who is happy."

The latter has:

Darakhti ki talkhash buvad gouhara,
Agar charb-u shirin dihi marwara,
Hamān miwa-é talkhat āṛad padid,
Azu charb-u shirin nakhwāhi mazid.

which undoubtedly inspired the famous passage in Firdousi's Hajv of Sultan Mahmūd:

Darakhti ki talkhast wayra serisht
Garash dar nishāni bibāgh-é behisht.
Waraz jūy-é khuldash bihangāṃ-é āb,
Bibīkh angabin rizi-u shahd-é nāṇb.
Saranjām gouhar bikāṛ āwurad,
Hamān miwa-é talkh bār āwurad.

The idea is the same; but what a difference between the presentment of it by the more ancient poet and the poetic graces which have made Firdousi's verses immortal?*

In one of his lyrical pieces Firdousi refers to another predecessor, Abu Tāṇhir Khusravani, and actually incorporates by way of *tadhmīn* one of the latter's verses:

Biyād-é jawāṇni kanun muya dāram,
Bidān bayt-é Bu Tāhir-é Khusravāṇni.
Jawāni manaz kūdaki yād dāram,
Derigha jawāṇni, derigha jawāni!

"I now mourn the memory of my departed youth in this verse of Abu Táhir Khusraváni: 'I bring back to memory my lost youth from the days of infancy. Alas and Alas for my youth!"

But the most considerable of Firdousi's predecessors in the realm of Iranian poetry were Rūdaki and Daqiqi. Of these, Rūdaki is, on all hands, regarded as the Father of Persian poetry. He flourished under the Sāmānide Princes

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* The poet Hatifi's (nephew of Jami) *jawab* is also felicitous and famous:
Agar baidha-e zagh-e zulmat serisht,
Nahi zir-e tawoos-e bagh-e bihisht.
Bihangam-e an baidha parwardanash,
Zi anjir-e jinnat dihi arzanash,
Dihi abash az chashma-e silsibil,
Baran baidha gar dam damad Jabrail
Shavad aqibat batcha-e zagh zagh,
Barad ranj-e bihuda tawoos-e bagh.

who achieved independence in Khorásán and Transoxiana, and ruled with great splendour and enlightenment for over a century, from 280 A. H. to 395 A. H. Rūdaki, like Homer, was born blind. Besides being a poet he was an accomplished musician; and he enjoyed unprecedented affluence and consequence at the court of Amir Nasr Sámáni. Firdousi was perhaps inspired more by the prosperity than by the poetry of Rūdaki. He is the first poet who composed a Diván; and he also versified the Fables of Bidpāi under the title *Kalilah wa Damna*. Firdousi refers to Rūdaki in connection with his notice of the latter work in the reign of Noushirwān :

Kalila bitāzi shud az pahlavi,
Bidin sān ki aknūn hami bishnavi.
Bitāzi hami būd ta gāh-é Nasr,
Bidān ta ki shud dar jehān shah-é asr.
Gudhāranda-ra pīsh bin'shāndand,
Hama nāma bar Rūdaki khwāndand
Bipaywast gūya parāganda-ra
Bisuft in chunin durr-é āganda-ra.

Neither Rūdaki's Divān nor his Masnavi of Kalilah has come down to us. But a number of his verses and fragments have been preserved; and these display a simplicity and straightforwardness of diction, which must in some measure have helped to mould Firdousi's style. His famous ode on Bokhara beginning :—

Būy-é jūy-é Mūliyān āyad hami,
Yād-é yār-é mihrbān āyad hami.

which so much affected his patron, Amir Nasr, that he rushed back to his forgotten capital, Bokhara, without waiting even to put his boots on,—is one example. Rudaki was a prolific writer and is said to have written innumerable verses.

But the one outstanding and genuine precurser of the poet of the Shahnama was Daqiqi.

Daqiqi first employed for his epic the *Taqārub* metre,* which is indeed the most appropriate for heroic poetry; and Firdousi is unquestionably indebted to him for the form,

* According to some authorities, the Taqarub was fixed as the epic metre even before Daqiqi, and it is believed to have been a genuine old Persian metre.

style, and language which distinguish his work. He is an important landmark in the development of Persian poetry, and laid truly and well the foundations upon which Firdousi reared the superb edifice of the Iranian Nationalepos.

CHAPTER V

DAQIQI

The portion of the Shahnama dealing with the advent of the prophet Zarathustra in the reign of King Gushtāsp, and the religious wars with the Turanian Arjāsp, is avowedly an interpolation, having been composed by Daqiqi and not by Firdousi. Firdousi refers to Daqiqi in sympathetic terms in the introductory portion of the Shahnama, and states that his predecessor had composed about a thousand verses dealing with Gushtāsp and Arjāsp, when his career was cut short by the dagger of a slave. Firdousi incorporates these verses in his epic, with an explanatory preface, and winds them up with a rather severe and ungenerous epilogue. According to the prefatory verses, Daqiqi appeared in a dream and entreated Firdousi to insert his verses and Firdousi complied with the request, and the portion beginning with the verse

Chu Gushtāsp-ra dād Luhrāsp takht,
Furūd āmad az takht-u bar bast rakht.

is entirely of Daqiqi's composition.

Some people, however, regard this whole story a fiction—an invention of the poet to explain away the much too favourable version of the mission of the ancient prophet of Iran given in this passage. They think that there is no very adequate reason why Firdousi should interrupt his own composition in this way; in particular, as he regards Daqiqi's verses as falling below the mark and scarcely deserving a place alongside his own work.

It may be that the poet had calumniators at court who would be quick to seize upon any matter proceeding from his pen, which savoured of heresy; and he might feel reluctant to furnish them with a handle. Daqiqi's composition would enable him to bridge over the gap which would otherwise remain in the national history, if he omitted referring altogether to so outstanding an event in the annals of Iran as

the coming of Zarathushtra and the spread of his gospel. Firdousi by adopting this device avoided the dilemma of either condemning the personality and doctrine of Zarathustra, which would undoubtedly have gone against his sources and poetic conscience, or provoking the displeasure of the fanatical element at court, and probably of the Sultan himself, by a just and sympathetic treatment of the subject. The featureless albeit fluent verses of Daqiqi would also serve as a foil to his own vigorous poetry. He indeed avows this to be one of his objects.

There is no question that Daqiqi is a historical personage. He was professedly a Zoroastrian, and the portion attributed to him by Firdousi appears to be his genuine work. The style and the diction differ from Firdousi's. The versification, although generally smooth and simple, lacks altogether the force, fire and felicity of expression which distinguish Firdousi. It is the work of a practised versifier, but not of a great poet. Daqiqi writes at a uniform level; but never once in the course of these hundreds of verses does he rise to the height of great poetry. There are certain words, mannerisms and turns of expression which do not occur in Firdousi.

Daqiqi flourished in the time of Nūh II of the House of Sāmān, who ascended the throne of his ancestors about 365 A.H. The Sámánide princes, boasting as they did a pure Iranian lineage, were anxious to revive the history of their forbears. It was at their suggestion that the chronicles of ancient Iran which had been collected were first versified. The task was entrusted to Daqiqi who had already made his mark as a poet and panegyrist at the court of Nūh and Mansūr. Daqiqi had a fluent and facile pen; but he would in all probability have proved unequal to the task. Unfortunately he was given to dissipated habits, and in consequence was murdered by one of his slaves in the prime of manhood, when he had barely composed about a thousand verses.* Firdousi alludes to Daqiqi's career thus :—

"Then there came a youth with an open tongue, eloquent, of pleasant nature and enlightened mind. 'I shall versify this

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* There is a remarkable similarity between the careers of Daqiqi and the English poet Marlowe. And as Marlowe was the harbinger of Shakespeare, so was Daqiqi of Firdousi.

chronicle of Kings', he declared; and all the people were pleased. Unfortunately his youth was given over to a vicious habit, and all his life he was struggling in the grip of evil. Death suddenly attacked him and laid its black cap upon his head. He died a victim to that vice, and was never really happy even for a single day. Good fortune turned its back upon him and he was murdered by one of his slaves. He composed a thousand verses relating to the history of Gushtāsp and Arjāsp, and his time ran out. Thus he passed away and this book remained incomplete. Oh Lord!, forgive him his sins and exalt his position on the Day of Account."

These one thousand verses of Daqiqi Firdousi has incorporated in the Shahnama in the account of the reign of Shah Gushtāsp. The poet says that he did so at the request of Daqiqi, who appeared before him in a dream and entreated him to insert the verses :—

Chunān dīd gūyanda yak shab bikhwāb
Ki yak jām-é may dāshti chun gulāb.
Daqiqi zi jāy-i padīd āmadi,
Barān jām-é may dāstąnha zadi.
Bi Firdousi āwāz dādi ki may,
Makhur juz biāieen-é Kāwoos-é Kay.
Ki shāhi guzidi bigītī ki bakht,
Bidu nāzad-u tāj-u dihim-u takht
Shahinshāh Mahmūd giranda shihr,
Zi ganjash bihar kas rasānida bihr.
Bidin nāma ar chand bishtāfti,
Kanun har ché justi hama yāfti.
Darin bāra man pīsh guftam sukhun,
Agar bāz yābi bakhīli makun.
Zi Gushtāsp-u Arjasp bayti hazar,
Biguftam sarāmad mara rūzgar.
Gar ān māya nazdé Shahinsheh rasad
Rawān-é man az khāk bar mih rasad.
Padhīruftam ān gufte-é oura bikhwāb,
Bi khūbi-u narmīsh dādam jawāb.
Ki man ham bipīsh-é tu khwāham rasīd,
Azin sharbatam mi bibāyad chashīd.
Kanun man bigūyam sukhun ku biguft,
Manam zinda ou gashta ba khāk juft.

"One night the poet dreamt that he had in his hand a cup of wine fresh as the rose and red, when Daqiqi suddenly appeared before him and began to discourse upon that cup of wine. He shouted to Firdousi and said, 'Do not quaff this cup except after the custom of King Kay-Káus; for you have for patron a King in whom Fortune, Crown and Diadem all glory—His Majesty Sultan Mahmūd, the conqueror of cities, whose bounty bestows a share of his boundless wealth on all. Now, for a time, you have been proceeding with this royal Book of Kings; and you have achieved all that you desired. But on this subject I too have sung verses before you; do not be niggardly in regard to them should you come upon them. I sang a thousand verses about Gushtāsp and Arjāsp, when my time ran out. Should these my verses reach the royal ear, my soul would be lifted up from the lowly dust where it lies to the firmament of the moon.' I agreed to Daqiqi's request in my dream, and answered him gently and kindly, saying, 'I too have one day to come near you, and taste the bitter draught of death.' Now, I shall proceed to recite the verses which he wrote: I am alive, while he has been reduced to dust."

In these passages Firdousi speaks sympathetically, if not enthusiastically, of Daqiqi and his literary effort. But at the end he passes a very severe judgment upon Daqiqi's verse, considers it feeble and lifeless, and indeed suggests that Daqiqi should not have attempted to versify these heroic chronicles, since he had not the capacity for it. He further says that he inserted these verses in order that the King might see the difference between his work and Daqiqi's work:—

"O thou eloquent man, now once again revert to thine own speech. Daqiqi brought the narrative up to this point when his life was cut short, and nothing remained of him except these weak words. I examined these verses and found them feeble; many a couplet was lacking in robustness. I inserted these verses in order that the King might see compositions which are of no use. Here were two jewels with two jewellers; let the king listen to our speeches and judge. If you have to write in this manner, better do not write at all and distress yourself. If you are going to experience only physical and spiritual distress, it is no use digging in a mine which yields no gems. Do not approach this royal history unless you

possess an intellect pure and fluent like running waters. It is much better that the mouth should remain hungry than that you should serve a meal that cannot agree."

However, in the end, his heart again relents towards his unlucky predecessor, and he acknowledges Daqiqi as his precursor and guide who had pointed to him the way he was to tread :

"There was a history full of heroic episodes, composed by those highsouled, truthful men. The stories were very old and in prose, and men's minds were disinclined to versify them. Nobody thought of putting the history in poetic garb, and it made my happy mind full of anxiety. I therefore shower praises and blessings upon the singer who versified it, although he did not versify even a thousandth part of these tales of feasting and fighting. Still he was the guide who pointed the way to the speaker (myself), and set Kings upon their seats of royalty. He praised monarchs and in panegyric poetry he was supreme. But his muse was unequal to the versification of this history, and the old times were not brought to life again by him."

Besides this fragment of the Shahnama Daqiqi wrote some qasidas and ghazals. The following is a pleasing example of his lyrical muse :

Dar afkand ay sanam abr-é bihishti
Zamin-ra khil'at-é Ardībihishti
Zamin bar sān-é khūnāluda diba,
Hawa bar sān-é mushk andūda dashti,
Bidān mānad ki gūyi az may-u mushk,
Mithāl-é dūst bar sahra navishti.
Buti rukhsār-é ou hamrang-é yāqut.
May-i bar gūna-é jām-é kanishti.
Jehān tāwoos gūna gasht gūyi,
Bijāyi narmi-u jāy-i durushti,
Zi gil būy-é gulāb āyad bidān sąn,
Ki pindāri gul andar gil sirishti.
Daqiqi chār khaslat bar guzidast,
Bigītī az hama khūbi-u zishti;
Lab-é yāqut rang-u nāla-é chang,
Sharāb-é nāb-u dīn-é Zardahishti.

The tradition that Daqiqi was a Zoroastrian is strong and ancient and is supported by this explicit declaration made by himself in the last verse. Professor E. G. Browne of Cambridge, however, thought that the evidence was insufficient, and that his name—Abu Mansúr, Muhammad b. Ahmad-ad-Daqiqi—"essentially and almost aggressively Muhammadan" —rather pointed to the contrary.* But the fact that Daqiqi selected the story of the ancient Prophet of Iran for versification, in the first instance, is very significant and cannot be easily explained away. Again, the terms in which Zarathushtra and his mission are described in this portion of the Shahnama are much too favourable to have proceeded from a non-Zoroastrian of those times :—

Chu yak chand gāhi bar āmad barīn,
Derakhti padīd, āmad andar zamīn,
Hama barg-é ou pand-u bārash khirad,
Kasiku chunān bar khurad kay mirad.
Khujasta pay-u nām-é ou Zardahusht,
Ki āhriman-é bad kunash-ra bikusht.

"A tree it was whose leaves were wise counsel, and whose immortal fruit wisdom itself. He of blessed advent, Zardusht by name, who destroyed the evil-working Ahriman."

Again the wording of certain lines like the following would sound curious if it proceeded from the pen of a genuine Mussalman :—

Ki ān khāna-ra dāshtandi chunan,
Ki mar Mecca-ra tāziyān in zamān.

"That House of Worship was held (in high veneration) even as the Arabs hold Mecca (Kaaba) at this day."

Daqiqi's verse is simple and fairly fluent, and he wrote a pure native idiom. Firdousi was undoubtedly influenced in the choice of his metre and vocabulary by the example of Daqiqi, who, although far inferior in poetic power, was the one genuine precursor of the author of the Shahnama.

The opening verses of this portion are a fair specimen of Daqiqi's style :—

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* In a foot-note to his edition of the Chahar Maqala, Professor Browne himself refers to "many instances derived from such respectable authorities as As-Sabi, Ibn Khalikan etc., of Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims bearing Muhammadan names, titles and Kuniyas."

Chu Gushtāspra dād Luhrāsp takht,
Furud āmad az takht-u bar bast rakht.
Bi Balkh-é guzin shud bidān Naubahār.
Ki Yazdān parastān bidān rūzgār
Marān khāna-ra dāshtandi chunān,
Ki mar Mecca-ra tāziyān in zamān.
Bidān khāna shud Shah-é Yazdān parast,
Furud āmad ānja-u haikal bibast.
Bibast ān dar-é bāfarīn khāna-ra,
Nahisht andar ān khāna bigāna-ra.
Bipūshid jāma parastish palās,
Khirad-ra bidin gūna bāyad sipās.
Biyafkand bāra furu hisht mūy,
Suyé Dāvar-é dādgar kard rūy.
Hami būd si sāl pīshash bipāy
Bidin sān parastīd bāyad Khudāy.

There are a few strong and felicitous lines some of which are repeated by Firdousi in various places :—

Gar aydun ki dāni ki man kardam in,
Mara khwānd bāyad jehān āfrin.

(These are God's words in Daqiqi. Firdousi puts them in the mouth of Shah Jamshid when he claims to be God in his profane arrogance.)

Padid āmad ān farra-é Īzadi,
Biraft az dil-é badsigālān badi.

* * * *

Nigar ta che jūy-i bidān kār kun,
Khirad bar guzin in jehān khwār kun.

* * * *

Sarat sabz bāda tan-u jān durust,
Mabāda Kayāni kamargāh sust.
Bisūzam nigārida kākh-é tura,
Zi bun bar kanam bīkh-u shākh-é tura.

* * * *

Ki ay kāshaki Īzad-é dādgar,
Nadādi mara in khirad win hunar!

(This is said by Jāmāsp when he foresees the issue of a disastrous war with Arjāsp, in which many princes of the royal

blood will perish. Firdousi puts a similar sentiment, in similar words into the mouth of Rustam Furrukhzād before the fatal battle of Qādasiyah :

Mara kāshaki in khirad nīsti,
Ki āgāhi-é rūz-é bad nīsti.

But, on the whole, Daqiqi's verse is weak and frequently halting. Firdousi does not exaggerate when he denounces it as feeble and wanting in robustness.

The following are a few examples of verses that may be considered "*Sust*" *and* "*na-tandarust,*" feeble and unsound.

Bipadhruft Gushtāsp gufta ki nīz,
Bifarmāyamash dādan az bazh chiz.
Rasid an navishta farumāya wār,
Ki binwashta būdi baré shahryār.
Shanidam wa didam sukhunha kuja,
Nabūdi tu mar guftanash-ra saza.
Na du māh bāyad hami na chihār,
Ki ma khud biyārim shirān bikār.

There are a number of such other feeble and pointless verses which need not be quoted.

Most of these lines are totally wanting in vigour and verve, and are clumsily propped up by the aid of feeble expletives. But more striking than this weakness of expression, is the absence of any passage displaying any real power of imagination in the course of these hundreds of verses. The descriptions of battles and warriors are tame and spiritless. Although there are situations which give scope for poetic treatment, the narrative strikes one as little more than rhymed prose. Daqiqi's work does serve as a foil to the brilliant performance of his more fortunate successor.

Daqiqi's style, although it has purity and simplicity, lacks the strength and majesty of Firdousi's normal utterance. Daqiqi has also certain mannerisms which are absent in Firdousi, e.g. his habit of following up a scene or sentiment with "*nigar-ta*—Behold!" His vocabulary is also slightly more archaic, and he frequently uses certain words which are rarely, if ever, found in Firdousi. He is also fond of the phrase *ba-afrin* as an adjective, and of compound adjectives like *pidar-dadeh*.

His descriptions of battle are insufferably tedious, without fire or spirit. There is an exchange of blows, one of the combatants is killed, and if he happens to be an Iranian, the poet comes out with the stock lamentation, *derigh-ān!*

Even a heroic incident like Girāmi entering the battle sword in one hand, banner in the other, and when one of his arms is cut off, holding the banner with his teeth, and fighting with one arm until he is struck down, is poorly and prosaically narrated both when Jāmāsp foretells the battle, and in the actual fight.

Such is not Firdousi's manner; and the contrast between the two is strikingly brought out as soon as Firdousi takes up the thread of the story, especially in the description of the thrilling fight put up by the aged Lohrásp against the Turanian marauders.

CHAPTER VI

SULTAN MAHMUD.

The fortunes of the House of Ghazni were founded by Alptagīn, a Turkoman slave in the service of Abdul Malik b. Nūh Sāmāni. He rose by his ability to high military rank, and was appointed Governor of Khorāsān about 350 A. H. He subsequently went to Ghazni. He had a slave Subuktagīn who rose in his favour, and ultimately married his daughter. Alptagīn was succeeded by his son Abu Ishāq, who however soon died. Subuktagīn displayed such qualities of administration and leadership that, on Abu Ishāq's death, he was chosen Governor of Ghazni about 365 A. H. For his services the Sāmānide ruler had conferred upon him the title of Nāsirud-din. Subuktagīn soon made himself independent of his overlord; and when he died in 383 A. H. the throne of Ghazni was to all intents and purposes self-supporting. His son Mahmūd had already distinguished himself, and the title of Saif-ud-dowla was bestowed upon him by the Sāmānian prince for his military achievements.

Mahmūd is famous in history as a soldier and conqueror; and his victorious expeditions into India pointed and paved the way for the permanent subjugation of India by Muslim

arms. His political and military history is wellknown. By his incursions and conquests he has left a name, great, indeed, and distinguished, but sadly soiled by cruelty, avarice, and religious bigotry. But he has a greater and cleaner claim to the remembrance of posterity for his achievements in another sphere. He was a man of culture and a great patron of learning and arts. It is said that there were as many as 400 poets at his court. He is himself said to have composed an authoritative treatise on law and theology; he also composed poetry, and established a great college and museum at Ghazni. But his most abiding fame, the circumstance by which he will be remembered, long after all memory of his splendid political and military triumphs has faded, is his association with the poet of the Shahnama:—

Biraft shaukat-é Mahmūd-u dar fisāné namānd,
Juzin quadar ki nashanākht qadr-é Firdousi.

"All the pomp and power of Mahmūd has vanished, and nothing now is remembered in story, except that he did not recognise the worth of Firdousi."—Jāmi.

This fame is indeed mixed and twofold. At various stages in the course of the poem, Firdousi has interrupted his narrative to sing the praises of the mighty monarch whom of all the princes of his time he considered worthy of being associated with his poetry:

Man in nāma farrukh gireftam bifāl,
Basi ranj burdam bibisyār sāl,
Nadīdam sarafrāz bakhshandai,
Bigāh-é Kayān bar derakhshandai
Sukhun-ra nigeh dāshtam sāl bīst,
Bidān to sazāwār-é in ganj kīst.
Jehāndār Mahmūd ba farr-u jūd,
Ki oura kunad māh-u kaywān sajūd.
Sar-é nāma-ra nām-é ou tāj gasht,
Bifarrash dil-é tīra chun āj gasht.

"I took up this book upon a blessed auspices, and I toiled at it for long years. I did not see any noble and liberal luminary shining upon the throne of Royalty. And so I kept my poem all to myself for 20 years until I found one worthy of this wealth. The Lord of the World, Mahmūd, full of

glory and grace, before whom the Moon and the Saturn stoop. His illustrious name has become the crown on the head of my book, and by his grace my blackened heart shines like ivory."

Probably no patron of letters has been praised in more magnificent terms than Sultan Mahmūd. The Qasida or panegyric poetry has been developed to an extreme limit in Iran; and poets like Anvari, Zahīr, Salmān and Khāqāni, have paid the most exquisite and extravagant compliments to their princely patrons.

But exquisite as many of these qasidas are, none of them has the quality of Firdousi's panegyric on Sultan Mahmūd, in point of sheer eloquence, felicity and dignity of expression. To quote a few of these verses

Jehān āfrin ta jehān afrīd
Chunu shahriyāri nayāmad padīd.

* * * *

Jehāndar Mahmūd shah-é buzurg,
Biābashkhur ārad hami mīsh-u gurg,
Chu kūdak lab az shīr-é mādar bishust,
Bigahwāra Mahmūd gūyad nakhust.
Tu nīz āfrin kun ki gūyanda-i
Bidu nām-é jāwid jūyanda-i.
Barān shahriyār āfrin khwāndam
Nabūdam diram jān bar afshāndam.
Zi farrash jehān shud chu bāgh-é bahār,
Hawa pur zi abr-u zamin pur nigār;
Zi abr andar āmad bihangām nam,
Jehān shud bi kirdār-é Bagh-é Iram.
Bibazm andarun āsmān-é wafast,
Birazm andarun tīz chang azhdahāst.
Bi tan zhinda pil-u bijān Jabraīl
Bi kaf abr-é Bahman bidil rūd-é Nīl.

"Ever since the Creator created this world, a Monarch like Mahmūd has not appeared upon the face of the Earth: Abul Qāsim, the Monarch of victorious fortune, who has placed his throne upon the crown of the Sun. He has adorned the Earth from East to West, and it is the power of his lustre that

produces the gold in mines.... When I beheld his royal countenance I questioned his courtiers. 'Is this the sky and the Moon, or the throne and the crown? Is it the stars arrayed before him or only his troops?" One answered, "This is the ruler of Rúm and of Hindustan, from Kanouj right up to the banks of the Indus. All the peoples of Iran and Turán are his servitors, and they draw their breath by his grace. Shah Mahmūd, the great Lord of the world, who makes the wolf and the lamb drink at the same pool. As soon as the baby wets its lips with its mother's milk, it utters the name "Mahmūd" in the cradle. Do thou too call a blessing upon him, for thou art a singer, and seekest eternal fame through him.' Then I rose and called blessings upon this mighty monarch. I had no coins to strew upon his head; I spilt my soul at his feet. By his glory the world has become like the spring-garden; the air is filled with raining clouds, and the earth is painted in gorgeous colourings. The clouds pour rain on earth in due season, and the world has blossomed like the Garden of Iram.* At the festive assembly he is the heaven of kindness; upon the battle-field a veritable dragon, sharp-clawed. In body like a mighty elephant, in spirit like Gabriel. His hand is bounteous like the raining cloud, and his heart is liberal like the river Nile."

THE SATIRE.

But if Firdousi in one breath lauded Mahmūd to the skies, in another he also damned him to everlasting infamy by a satire, which is perhaps the most terrific denunciation of an individual in the history of literature. This famous satire is prefixed to every edition of the Shahnama; and for one person acquainted with the verses in praise of the Sultān, there are ten familiar with the *Hajv* (Satire), which has conferred such an odious immortality upon him. It is to the credit of Firdousi that, even here, he has maintained the lofty level of his normal utterance and this "scathing satire, writ in fire"—as Edmund Gosse calls it—is entirely free from the coarseness, vulgarity and ribaldry which characterise Persian satirical compositions in general. From start to finish the all-powerful monarch is subjected to a concentrated fire

* A fabulous garden laid out by Shaddad, in the pride of his power, to rival the glories of Paradise.

of devastating though dignified denunciation, and the verses descend upon his head in rapid succession like the stunning strokes of a sledge-hammer.

According to Nizāmi Arūzi, Firdousi was prevailed upon by Sepahbud Shahriyār, Governor of Tabarastan, to destroy this satire; and only about half a dozen verses (which Nizāmi quotes) survived. But this statement cannot be accepted as correct; for the satire has come down to us practically intact, and its genuineness cannot be doubted. Some colour is lent to this statement of Nizāmi by certain denunciatory verses attributed to Firdousi, which are quoted in Bāisangharkhan's Preface:

Bi Ghaznin mara garché khun shud jigar,
Zi bīdād-é ān shāh-é bidādgar.
Kazu hīch shud ranj-é si sāle-am
Shanīd āsmān az zamin nāle-am
Wa liken bifarmūda-é Muhtashim,
Nadānam kizin pīsh chun sar kasham,
Firistādam ar guftai dāshtam,
Binazdīk-é khud īch naguzāshtam.
Agar bāshad in guftaha na-sawāb,
Bisuzān dar ātash bishuyān dar āb.
Guzashtam aya Sarwar-é nīkrāy,
Azin dāvari ta bidigar sarāy.
Rasad lutf-é Yazdān bifaryād-é man,
Sitānad bimahshar azu dād-é man.

"Although in Ghazni my liver turned to blood owing to the tyranny of that tyrant, on account of whom my labour of 30 years has come to nought; and the Heavens have heard my cries of despair, still I do not know how I can disregard the commands of the Muhtashim.* Well, I send to you whatever I have composed, not keeping back anything. If these verses are unrighteous, burn them in fire or wash them out with water. I pass, O thou righteous Chieftain, from this to a Higher Tribunal, where the mercy of God will redress my wrongs, and exact justice from him on the Day of Doom."

The verses of the Satire have been very popular. Several passages are famous and some of the lines have become pro-

* Muhtashim was the official title of the rulers of Kohistan in those days.

verbial and are frequently quoted. Well does Maulāna Shibli observe : "Look at the all-conquering might of the written word ! Mahmūd ravaged and subverted great empires and made the whole world topsyturvy. But the word which fell from the poet's lips still stands and will stand till Dooms-day:"

Ki shā'er chu ranjad bigūyad heja,
Bimānad heja ta qiyāmat bija.

"For when the poet is aggrieved and sings a satire, that satire lives till the Day of Doom."

Several reasons are given for the revulsion of feeling which led the Sultan to break his faith and disappoint the sanguine expectations which he had raised in the poet's mind. (1) Religious antipathy arising from the fact that Firdousi was a Shia whereas the Sultan was a staunch Sunni. (2) Political distrust due to Firdousi's friendship with the House of Daylam who were rivals of the Ghaznavides. (3) Firdousi's apotheosis of high lineage, in season and out of season, which was bound to be distasteful to Mahmúd, who by birth was the son of the slave of a slave. (4) Perhaps the most potent of all was the hostility and calumny of some person in high position who had a grudge against the poet.

Here are some of the verses of this celebrated Satire :—

Aya Shah Mahmūd kishwar gushāy,
Zi kas gar natarsi bitars az Khudāy.
Ki pīsh az tu shāhān farāwān budand,
Hama tājdāran-é kaihān budand.

* * * *

Basi ranj burdam dar in sāl-é si
Ajam zinda kardam bidin Pārsi
Chu Isa manin murdagān-ra tamām
Yakāyak hami zinda kardam binām
Jehān az sukhun karda-am chun bihisht.
Azin pīsh tukhm-é sukhun kas nakisht.
Jehāndār agar nīsti tang-dast,
Mara bar sar-é gāh būdi nishast.
Agar Shāh ra shāh būdi pidar,
Bisar bar nihādi mara tāj-é zar;
Wagar mādar-é Shāh bānu budi,
Mara sīm-u zar ta bizānu budi

Chu andar tubārash buzurgi nabūd,
Nayārust nām-é buzurgān shanūd.
Sar-é nāsazayān bar afrāshtan,
Waz īshān umīd-é bahi dāshtan,
Sar-é rishta-é khish gum kardanast,
Bijīb andarun mār parwardanast.
Derakhti ki talkh ast way-ra sirisht,
Garash dar nishāni bi bāgh-é bihisht,
Waraz jūy-é khuldash bihangām-é āb
Bibikh angabin rīzi-u shahd-é nāb,
Saranjām gouhar bikār āwurad.
Hamān miwa-é talkh bār awurad.
Bi amber furūshān agar bugzari,
Shavad jāma-é tu hama ambari.
Wagar tu shavi nazdé angishtgar,
Azu juz siyāhi nayābi digar.
Bi nāpāk zāda madarid umīd,
Ki zangi bishustan nagardad supīd.
Azin guftam in bayt-ha-é buland
Ki ta shāh gīrad azin kār pand,
Digar shā'irān-ra nayāzārad ou,
Hamān hurmat-é khud nigih dārad ou.
Ki shā'ir chu ranjad bigūyad heja,
Bimānad heja ta qiyāmat bija.

No translation can adequately convey to a foreign reader the force and felicity of these verses. The power of the satire can only be felt in the original.

"Oh thou world-conquering Monarch, if you are not afraid of men, at least fear God; for there have been numerous kings before thee, all rulers of this Earth. They ruled in righteousness and truth, and never trafficked in falsehood and fraud. In pomp and power, in treasures, armies, thrones and diadems, they were all supirior to you. Much have I toiled and drudged in these 30 years, and I have revived the glories of old Iran with my poetry. Like Jesus I have brought to life again all these dead. I have turned this earth into paradise with my poetry; no one before me has sown the seeds of speech like me. If the ruler of the world were not a niggard, I should have my seat upon a throne. If the king had a king for his father he would have placed a crown of gold upon my

head; and if his mother were a lady born, I should have stood knee-deep in treasures. But since there was no greatness in his pedigree he could not bear to hear the glories of the Great. To exalt the heads of the unworthy, and to hope for good at their hands, is to lose the thread of one's path, and to nourish a serpent in one's bosom. A tree which by nature is bitter—even though you should plant it in paradise, and at the time of watering it pour into its roots honey and sweet celestial syrups, in the end it will display its true nature, and produce only bitter fruit. If you pass by perfume-sellers your dress will partake of the perfume. If you associate with a coal-seller blackness is all that you will derive from him. Have no hope of the low-born, for an Ethiopian cannot be washed white however much you strive. I have sung these lofty verses only in order that the Monarch might take warning from this matter, that he may understand what poetry means, may take the admonition of this old man, may not molest other poets, and have regard for his own honour. For when a poet is aggrieved he sings a satire, and that satire lives till the day of Doom."

CHAPTER VII
CHARACTER

The moral character of Firdousi, to judge by his utterances and the quality of his poetry, was very high. His poetry reveals a man singularly pure-minded and magnanimous, gentle and generous, deeply religious in the best sense of the term, and burning with a lofty patriotism without parallel in the history of letters. He condemns falsehood, cruelty, cowardice, duplicity, avarice and disloyalty. He is broad-minded and tolerant and entirely free from bigotry of any sort.* His speech is always informed by a spirit of deep piety, high seriousness and absolute sincerity. There is neither cynicism, nor misanthropy, nor blasphemy in Firdousi. He had a clean, reverent and humble mind, and with all his confidence in the immortal character of his poetry he has no

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* Firdousi's breadth of spirit and large tolerance are observable in the liberal terms in which he describes even an "idolatrous" King of India:

"There was a King of India at the time named Kaid, wise, enlightened, and victorious. He had the heart of sages and the mind of liberal and heroic men; the dignity of Kayans and the divine glory of Mubeds."

arrogance. Verses like the following found in some copies of the Shahnama, which betray a fanatical Shia spirit, are entirely alien to his nature and are obviously spurious :

Harān kas ki dar dil'sh kīn-é Alīst,
Azu khwārtar dar jehān gu ki kīst?
Nabāshd juz az bipidar dushmanash,
Ki Yazdān biātash bisūzad tanash.

"No one could be meaner than one who harbours enmity towards Ali. Only a bastard would be his enemy. May God consume his body in the fire of hell."

His poetry, the reflex of his mind, is clean and healthy, and singularly free from the insincerity and sickly sentimentalism which mar a great portion of Persian poetry. There is no trace in him of the licentiousness and unnatural vices in which a good many Persian poets, even of the first rank, indulged or affected to indulge. Daqiqi's weakness in this direction he deplores in chaste and dignified language :

Jawānish-ra khūy-é bad yār būd,
Aba bad hamisha bi paykār būd.

"His youth was given over to vicious courses, and he was ever struggling in the toils of evil."

Nor does his language anywhere descend—not even in the Satire—to the coarse ribaldry so conspicuous in the writings of many of his compatriots.

At the same time Firdousi is no withered ascetic, no gloomy fanatic, denouncing the world and the good things of life; He was obviously fond of good living and the creed of stern self-denial and rigid repression of natural appetites has no attraction for him. To him life is a divine gift to be enjoyed to the full within the limits of natural laws and the moral code. For Firdousi, fear of God and avoidance of pain to others are the only limitations upon the traditional free and joyous living of the Iranian :

Bitars az Khuda-u mayāzār kas,
Rah-é rastgāri haminast-u bas.

"Fear God and harm no creature. This alone is the road to Salvation, and this will suffice."*

Bi-āzāri i.e. harmlessness—"innocence" in its radical sense, —is, according to Firdousi, the chief ornament of royalty as it is the fundamental principle of blessed living: Thus both Kay Khusrav and Noushirwān emphasise this quality in their exhortations to their successors:

Kay Khusrav's abdication and renunciation of the world is alien to the Iranian temperament and tradition, and is condemned through the mouth of Zál:

"Perhaps the Devil has been instigating him, since he has turned away from the path of God. The God-fearing Farīdūn and Hushang never cast their hands upon this branch."

True to the traditional practice and temper of his people Firdousi is fond of wine, song and conviviality. He describes drinking, feasting and hunting with a gusto which leaves no doubt that he enjoyed these material pleasures of life to the full. Feasting, merry-making, and free drinking he regarded as characteristic of the golden age of Iranian power and glory; and Prohibition he looked upon as the badge of a dark and degenerate time, the age of blood and iron, that came upon Iran with the overthrow of the Sassanian empire:

Chunān fāsh gardad gham-u ranj-u shūr,
Ki rāmish bihangām-é Bahrām Gūr,
Nabāshad bahār az zimistān padīd,
Nayārand hangām-é rāmish nabīd.

"(In that dark time) sorrow, suffering, and distress will become as widespread as joyousness was in the time of Bahrám Gúr. There will be no difference between the bright bloom of Spring and the bleak blight of Winter; and wine will not be forthcoming even in the hour of rejoicing."

Háfiz similarly deplores the incubus of Prohibition which was for a short time imposed upon his people under Muhammad Muzaffar:

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* Hafiz also similarly sums up this wholesome creed of pursuit of happiness and avoidance of injury to others:

Mabash dar pay-e azar-u harch-e khwahi kun,
Ki dar tariqat-e ma ghayr azin gunahi nist.

"Do not pursue the path of injury to others, and for the rest do what you like. For in our creed there is no other sin except this."

Agarche bādeh farah-bakhsh-u bād gul-bīz ast,
Bibāng-é chang makhur may ki muhtasib tīz ast.
Zi rang-é badeh bishūyid khirqaha az ashk,
Ki mūsam-é wir'-u rūzgār-é parhiz ast.

"Altho' the wine be exhilarating and the breezes fresh and fragrant, do not drink wine to the sound of the harp, for the Censor of morals is harsh and watchful. Wash your patched garments clean of wine with your tears, for it is the time of abstinence and of Prohibition."

There are innumerable passages in the Shahnama giving expression to this spirit of free living, drinking, and feasting :

Ki jām-é birādar birādar khurad,
Huzhabr ān ki ou jām-é may bishkarad.

* * * *

Kanun khurd bāyad may-é khushgawār,
Ki mi būy-é mushk āyad az kuhsār.
Hawa pur khurūsh-u zamin pur zi jūsh,
Khunuk ānki dil shād dārad bi nūsh.
Diram dārad-u nuql nān-u nabid,
Sar-é gūspandi tawānad burīd.

* * * *

Garat hast jāmi may-é zard khwāh,
Bidil khurrami-ra madār az gunāh.

* * * *

Chu piri darāyad nagih bimard,
Jawānash kunad bāda-é sāl khurd.
Kira kūz shud pusht-u bālāsh past,
Bi Kaywān barad sar shu shud nīm mast.

"A brother's cup can only be drunk by a brother. He who can drain such a cup of wine is a veritable lion." (Rustam says this when only his brother, Zaváreh, alone in the whole company, is able to drain the measure of wine which he has dealt out.)

* * * *

"Now is the time to drink delicious wine, for fragrant breezes blow from the mountain-side. The air is exhilarating

and the earth is full of life. Happy those whose hearts are gladdened by drink, who have the means to procure sweets and bread and wine and meat."

* * * *

"If you have a cup ask for the golden liquor. Do not regard that which gladdens the heart as sinful."

* * * *

"When old age suddenly overpowers a man, it is old wine that will make him young again."

"He whose back has become bent and whose stature stoops, will have his head raised to the seventh heaven when he becomes half-drunk."

Firdousi's kings and warriors, whose exploits he delights in describing, are all free drinkers, and as doughty with the cup and the trencher as with the sword and the spear. About Rustam, his paragon of chivalry and martial faith, he says :

Bimay bātu Iblis-ra pāy nīst.

"The Devil himself cannot vie with thee in wine drinking."

Firdousi had also a weakness for gold and money; and greed of money was perhaps the only vice which stained his otherwise pure and noble nature. With all his lofty faith in the immortal destiny of his work, Firdousi seems to have winged his poetic flight for gain rather than glory. The promised reward draws him on like an ever-receding mirage, through all the long years of unremitting toil and alternate hopes and fears. It is pathetic to note how so great a mind hankers after gold; and when it ultimately eludes his grasp, experiences a terrible, almost crushing, disappointment, as if he has toiled in vain and all his labour has been lost. The bleak evening of his life is apparently not cheered by the experience of unparalleled contemporary fame, and confident anticipation of an immortal destiny.

But Firdousi does not stand alone among poets in regard to this craving for gold and the good things of life. In Iran, at any rate, in Firdousi's time and long after, the poet commanded his own price, and enjoyed a degree of affluence and

consequence at the court of princes which appears amazing to us. He had before him the stimulating examples of the munificence of some of the Sámánide princes and of Sultan Mahmúd himself towards their court-poets. Rudaki's magnificence was greater than that of any noble of Amir Nasr's court. He had 200 slaves in his retinue; and 400 camels carried his baggage when he travelled. He was paid 40000 dirhems for versifying Kalila and Damna. Unsuri, Sultan Mahmūd's poet-laureate and Firdousi's contemporary, enjoyed still greater wealth and consequence. His household utensils and plate were all of silver and gold, as Kháqáni mentions :

Shanidam ki az nuqra zad dīgdān,
Zi zar sākht ālāt-é khān Unsuri.

Ghazāyari received seven purses of gold from Sultan Mahmūd for the following two extravagant verses in praise of the Sultan :

Sawāb kard ki payda na kard hardu jehān,
Yagāna Izad-é Dādār-é binazīr-u hamāl.
Wagarna hardu bibakhshīdi birūz-é sakha,
Umid-é banda namāndi bi Izad-é mut'āl.

"The unique Lord, the Just Creator, without equal or partner, did well not to make manifest both the worlds at the same time. Otherwise, on the day of alms-giving thou (the king) shouldst have given away both of them, and I should have nothing left to expect from God, the Most High."

For a quatrain improvising an ephemeral incident, Mahmūd ordered Unsuri's mouth to be thrice filled with pearls and precious stones. Mo'ezzi, the court-poet of Sultan Sanjar, was equally fortunate in the honours and treasures which his patron showered upon him. Amir Khusrav, when he dedicated his Masnavi of *Nuh Sipihr* to Sultan Qutbuddin Mubārak b. Alāuddin Khilji, was paid an elephant-weight of rupees by his patron, as he himself records in his poem.

By the time of Anvari a proper reward, in accordance with these princely precedents, had become an established institu-

tion; and the poet's power was so firmly established that he was almost in a position to blackmail. Thus Anvari :—

Sih bayt rasm buvad shā'erān-é tām'e-ra
Yaki madīh wa digar qat'a-é taqāzai.
Agar bidād siwum shukr, war nadād heja,
Azin sih bayt du guftam digar che farmāi?

"Ambitious poets are accustomed to publish three types of poetry; first panegyric, second a demand; third thanksgiving if the demand is granted; if not, satire. Of these three I have addressed you the first two.—What have you to say next?"

The entire Qasida poetry of Iran is in a sense the literature of combined flattery and mendicancy; and with all its intellectual graces and power the qasida is a poor ignoble performance of which neither the poet nor the patron can feel proud. However, it is perhaps unfair to judge of mediaeval Iranian poets and poetry by foreign and modern standards of taste. In Iran the Qasida has persisted for centuries as a recognised medium of poetic expression; and the dedication to a princely patron of any considerable work has from the start been an established literary convention. Viewed in this light Firdousi's lavish flattery of Sultan Mahmūd, and even his importunate clamour for gold, need not be regarded as a very serious blot upon his character.

Firdousi's personality is so completely merged in, and his whole life so absolutely overshadowed by the great work to which he devoted it, that one might say that the poem is the man. The loftiness of his mind and the magnanimity of his nature are both faithfully reflected in his utterances, and it is difficult to think of him apart from his poetry. He might indeed have sung with Zeebun-nissa, the gifted daughter of the Emperor Aurangzebe :

Dar sukhun makhfi shudam man hamchu*
bu dar bargé gul,
Harki dārad mayl-é dīdan dar sukhun bīnad mara!

"I am merged and hidden in my poetry, like the scent in the rose. Whoever desires to see me can only perceive me in my poetry."

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* "Makhfi" (hidden) was also the pen-name of this poetess.

Chapter VIII

RELIGION

Firdousi's religion is pre-eminently the worship of the one God, all-powerful, all-merciful, all-prevading, eternal. In his view, God is the sole creator of the earth and of the heavens and heavenly bodies. He has no equal, partner or rival. He is the sole supreme and eternal master of the Universe. There are no other gods in the Shahnama. Firdousi does not employ any celestial hierarchy or numerous agencies of the Godhead. The only agent of divine purposes whom he systematically mentions is the angel *Sarūsh*,—Sraosha—of the Zoroastrian scriptures,—who frequently appears on the earthly plane to convey God's messages. However, in all probability, the passages in which Sraosha is made to intervene in human affairs were taken from Avesta or Pahlavi sources; as for instance, when the angel descends forbidding Farídun to kill Zahhāk.

Firdousi's own belief is one of pure unadulterated monotheism. This fundamental persuasion he attributes to all his kings and warriors—sometimes, incongruously enough, even to wicked and anti-Iranian potentates, like Afrāsiyāb and Arjāsp. Even Alexander the Great, is made out to be a worshipper of one God; but he erroneously considers him to have been a Christian. God, according to Firdousi, is the author, arbiter and disposer of everything. He is everywhere and nowhere, and by his own power and spirit reaches the mightiest, as well as the meanest and minutest of created objects. Although Firdousi believes in a personal God with human attributes, he does not give to the Supreme Being a local habitation or, indeed, any fixed name. He is neither Allah, nor Jehovah, nor Ahura-Mazda. The poet's practice is to call the Deity by numerous reverent descriptive names. Thus besides Yezdān and Izad he uses :

Khuda or Khudāvand	Lord, Master.
Kirdigār	Maker.
Āfarinandah	Creator.
Darandeh	Keeper, preserver,
Parwardigār	Nourisher, Maintainer.

Jehān-āfrin	Creator of the world.
Dāvar or Dādgar	The Just, The Judge.
Dādār	Saviour, Helper.
Jehāndār or Jehānbān	Master or Keeper of the World.
Ruzi-dih	Giver of Livelihood.
Bakhshandeh	Giver of bounties.
Kaihān-khadív	Lord of the Universe.
Jān-āfrin	Creator of the soul.

Rabb or—Master, is also very rarely used; but Allah or Iláhi never. Nor does he employ the specifically Islamic epithets like Rahīm, Rahmān, Razzāq, Qādir, Khaliq* etc.

Firdousi considers it vain and futile to attempt to describe or even to praise the Almighty and Incomprehensible :

Satūdan man oura nadānam chu hast
Mayān bandagi-ra bibāyad-'t bast
Bihastīsh bāyad ki khastu shawi,
Zi guftār-é bikār yaksu shawi,
Nayābad bidu nīz andisha rāh,
Ki ou bartar az nām-u az jāygāh.
Azin purda bartar sukhun gāh nist,
Bihastīsh andisha-ra rāh nist.

"I know not how to sing His praises; one can only bind his waist in worship. Be thou content to accept His being and put aside unavailing talk..... Even Thought cannot reach Him, for He is above name and place. The Word cannot transcend the curtain of the sky, and Imagination has no access to His being."

Yet his devotion is so great that almost at every step he incontinently bursts forth into the loftiest strains of adoration and praise. Almost every letter, every speech of a king or chief, begins with the praise of God; and in his own proper person too he pours forth devotional hymns at

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* The verse in praise of Omar containing the word *Khaliq*
Umar anki bud mouminan-ra amir,
Satuda wara Khaliq-e binazir.
is spurious and an interpolation. So also the solitary verse containing the word *Ilah* :
Azidar chunan shav binazd-e Ilah
Ki muri nayazarad az tu birah.
Two other doubtful lines contain the words "Aj' allah" and "Allaho-akbar."

frequent intervals. These devotional passages in point of sublimity and sincerity of sentiment, and purity and majesty of language, are on a level with the hymns of prayer and praise in the sacred scriptures of the world:

The eloquence and majesty of Firdousi's language is not seen to greater advantage than in these devotional passages:

Barān āfrin ku jehān āfrīd,
Zamin-u zamān-u makān āfrīd,
Ki ārām azūyast-u ham kām azūy.
Ham āghāz azūyast-u anjām azūy.

* * * *

Ki bakhshanda ouyast-u dārandé oust,
Buland āsmān-ra nigārandé oust.

* * * *

Ki bar gīrad ānra ki tu bifkani
Ki payvandad ānra ki tu bishkani?

* * * *

Sitāyash kunam īzad-é pāk-ra,
Ki gūya-u bīna kunad khāk-ra.
Bi mūri dihad mālish-é narr-é shīr,
Kunad passheh bar pīl-é jangi dilīr.

* * * *

Saré nāma kard āfrin-é Khudāy,
Kuja hast-u bāshad hamīsha bijāy.
Barāranda-é māh-u Kaywān-u hūr,
Nigāranda-é farr-u dihim-u zūr.
Sipihri barin gūna bar pāy kard,
Shab-u rūz-ra giti āray kard.
Tawāna wa dāna wa dārandé oust,
Khirad-ra wa jān-ra nigarandé oust.

* * * *

Nigihdār-é khushki-u darya tuī
Khudāwand-é charkh-u surayya tūi.

* * * *

Nigāranda-e charkh-é gardandeh oust,
Fazāyanda-é farra-é bandeh oust.

"Praise be to Him who created the world, earth, and Time

and Space. Peace is from Him and success, the beginning and end of all things."

* * * *

"He is the Giver of gifts and the Preserver. He is the painter of this lofty firmament."

* * * *

"Who can raise up those whom Thou layest low? Who can join and make whole what Thou hast broken?"

* * * *

"I praise and worship the Holy Spirit which endows mere dust with speech and sight. He gives to the ant the power to molest a lion, and can make the feeble gnat prevail over the mighty elephant."

* * * *

"He began his message with the praise of the God, who is and will for ever endure. The creator of the Moon, Saturn and the Sun, the illuminator of royal glory, power and diadem. He who created these mighty heavens, and decked the Earth with day and night. He hath power and knowledge, He sustains all, and He is the illuminator of man's soul and Reason."

* * * *

"Thou art the preserver of the land and sea, the Master of the sky and the stars!"

* * * *

"He is the painter of the revolving dome, He it is who increaseth man's glory and power."

Firdousi is equally positive as regards retribution and life after death. Like Socrates he had an implicit belief in the power of virtue, and he had also a firm faith in the survival of the soul. He does not enter into any philosophic disquisition as regards the nature of the human soul any more than the nature of the Diety. His creed though unquestioned is not quite consistent. In one breath he does not appear to deny man's responsibility for his actions; in another he makes him out to be a helpless tool in the rigorous and relentless hands of Fate. In some passages man is assumed to have free choice between good and evil. In others human effort is shown

as unavailing against the inexorable decrees of Fate. The poet's creed is moral and popular rather than philosophically consistent. What is to be will be; no amount of human effort can avoid the predestined ends of fixed fate. The law of retribution is certain and absolute. From good cometh good and from evil only evil. Not only does Firdousi believe in a future state of beatitude or torment for the human spirit after death; but even in earthly life he believes evil cannot permanently prosper, nor good altogether fail.

Outside these fundamental principles of moral faith, Firdousi has large tolerance and does not condemn any of the revealed religions.* He was outwardly a Mussalman and apparently strongly inclined towards Shiism. Apart from his deep and obvious sympathy with the faith, morals and institutions of ancient Iran, there are no visible grounds for holding that Firdousi was, as conjectured by some people, a Zoroastrian in disguise.

He has depicted the pre-Islamic Iranian as pious and truthful, brave and generous, pure in spirit, and a worshipper of the true God. He refers to the ancient creed of Iran everywhere with reverence, and denounces the contemptuous condemnation of Zoroastrianism as a mere cult of fire-worship;

Yaki hafte dar pīsh-é Yazdān budand,
Magūyi ki ātash parastān budand.
Ki ātash darān gāh mihrāb būd,
† *Parastanda -ra dīda purāb būd.*

"For one week they stood before the Lord in worship;—do not say that they were fire-worshippers. For fire was in those times the arch of worship, and the worshipper turned towards it with tears in his eyes. "(In the mosque the *mihrab*, or arch, marks the direction of Mecca towards which the faithful turns his face in prayer).

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* Firdousi's religious tolerance, remarkable in any age and clime, is simply amazing in a Persian of the 10th century, a time of deadly sectarian hatreds and religious persecutions. It is in refreshing contrast, not only with the intolerance of Islam in those bigoted times, but with the gloomy fanaticism of the Roman Church then and for centuries thereafter, and of Christian poets like Dante.

† The verse commonly quoted *Magui kiatash parastan budand; Parastanda-e-pak yazdan budand,* is spurious.

Although in isolated passages he himself applies to the ancient Iranians the epithet Atash-parast, he does so without any disparagement.

Digar shab chunān dīd k'ātash parast,
Si ātash furūzān girefteh bidast.

He mentions even the ancient Mázdyasnan creed of Iran of pre-Zoroastrian times with respect:

"We are not ashamed of our ancient creed. There is no faith better than that of Hoshang in the world. Why do you turn away from the faith of Kayumarth and the creed and custom of Tahmuras? They declare that there is only one Lord and Master of the Universe, and your part is to praise and serve Him."

But in essence Firdousi's religion is the religion of all good men, founded upon the eternal principles of belief in God, Truth, Goodness, Justice and Purity. He extols these fundamental virtues and condemns the basic vices like Pride, Lust, Falsehood, Injustice, Greed and Cruelty. Courage and generosity also he places high among human virtues. He lays no store by either ritual or dogma, and makes his favourite kings and warriors derive strength and succour through acts of pure adoration. Not only mighty monarchs, like Farídun and Kay Khusrav, but even his men of arms, his warriors to whom fighting and killing are bread and meat, invariably resort to prayer and worship of the Supreme Being in every crisis.

In his view every incident in human life and history, however trivial or catastrophic, is referable to the creation, control and direction of the One Power in whom all life originates, reposes and ends.

Although in several verses he appears to condemn the Mázdyasnan doctrine of Dualism, he was none the less oppressed by the phenomenon of Dualism, so conspicuous in physical and moral life. Everywhere he sees the manifestations and the unceasing struggle of good and evil, light and darkness, Izad and Ahriman. At times he is perplexed and baffled at the failure of good and the apparent triumph of evil:

Chap-u rāst harsu shitābam hami,
Sarā pāy-é giti nayābam hami.
Yaki bad kunad nīk pīsh āyadash.
Jehān banda-u bakht khísh āyadash.
Digar juz binīki jehān nasparad,
Zamāna hami dam baru bifsarad.

"I wander up and down, and right and left; I cannot make head or tail of the ways of the world. One treads the path of evil and good accosts him; the world becomes his thrall and Fortune fraternises with him. Another never takes a step except on the path of virtue; yet the breath of time is cold upon him."

According to the great Muslim divine, Imam Ahmad Ghazáli,* Firdousi has summed up the essence of all true religion in a couple of verses:—

Zi rūz-é guzar-kardan andīsha kun,
Parastidan-é Dādgar písha kun,
Binīki girāy-u mayāzár kas,
Rah-é rastgāri haminast-u bas.

"Ever keep in mind the day of departure, and make the worship of the Lord thy business in life. Incline to goodness, and harm no creature; this alone is the path of salvation, and this is enough."

It is extremely difficult to fix Firdousi's Islamic beliefs and the school to which he belonged. In no respect is the text of the Shahnama more recklessly tampered with than in passages alluding to the poet's religious opinions. A great number of lines are spurious and even impudent interpolations; and probably whole passages have been inserted by fanatical and unscrupulous scribes. It would be extremely unsafe to attribute any particular sectarian persuasion to the poet on the strength of these dubious passages. He has nowhere expressed any definite dissent from the Islamic dogma; and it would be incorrect to say that for all practical purposes Firdousi professed any other faith than Islam. But he was a rather mild Mussalman, exceptionally tolerant and broad-

* Younger brother of "Hujjat-ul-Islam," Imam Muhammad Ghazali. He was a doctor of the Shafii sect, and died at Qazwin, A. H. 517 A. D. 1123. The great Imam Ghazali, (1058-1111 A. D.) was like Firdousi, a native of Toos.

minded, and religious bigotry and dogmatism are entirely alien to his nature. As Noldeke points out, the words about God at the beginning of the poem are just deistic, not specifically Islamic; and even in the elegy on the death of his son, where his heart speaks at its clearest and sincerest, there is no sentiment expressive of any dogmatic Islamic belief. There are stray passages in which no particular reverence is shown towards Muslim persuasions, e.g. the passage in which it is stated that, for the ancients, fire determined the direction of worship as for the Arabs a stone—alluding no doubt to the Holy Black Stone at Mecca. Some of the lines purporting to exalt Islam and its founder are spurious. Noldeke regards the whole passage containing the dream of Kisra Noushirwán about the advent of the Prophet Muhammed as "most certainly faked." Still, in numerous other passages Firdousi appears most decidedly a Mussalman; and as Professor Sherani illustrates, some of the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Islam find expression in the Shahnama. In several places Islam and the Prophet are mentioned with profound respect.

Azin pas biyāyad yaki nāmdār,
Zi dasht-é sawārān-é nizeh-guzār.
Yaki mard-é pākiza-u nīk-khūy,
Bidu dín-é Yazdan shawad chār sūy.

"Here after an Illustrious Man will come from the desert of the spear-wielding riders (Arabia):—a man pure and virtuous, by whom the religion of God will spread in all four directions."

And again:

Chihārum zi tāzi yaki dīn-é pāk,
Saré hūshmandān barārad zi khāk.

"Fourthly, the Leader of the wise will bring to the earth a holy creed among the Arabs."

On the other hand, a line like the following would sound somewhat curious from a devout Muslim:

Che khush guft dināwar-é tāziyan,
Ki khashm-é pidar jānat ārad ziyān.

"How well has the bringer of the faith of the Arabs said "The wrath of thy father will corrode thy soul."

For Ali the poet appears to have had a genuine veneration; and the poem abounds in passages expressive of strong Shia proclivities; atlhough many of these may not be genuine at all. But the tradition that Firdousi was a staunch Shia is both strong and ancient. Nizámi Arúzi speaks of his being denounced as a Rafizi before Sultan Mahmúd, who himself was a Sunni, and quotes verses from the Shahnama savouring of ultra-Shiism:

Mara ghamza kardand kān pur sukhun,
Bimihr-é Nabi-u Ali shud kuhun.
Garaz mihr-é shān man hikāyat kunam,
Chu Mahmūd sad-ra himāyat kunam.

The poet's native city, Toos, in his day was thoroughly Shiitical.

It is difficult for a Non-Islamic writer to do adequate justice to this topic. Perhaps the most thorough and suggestive study of Firdousi's Islamic beliefs which the present writer has come across, is contained in Professor Mahmúd Khan Sheráni's essay on *"Firdousi-ka Mazhab"* (Firdousi's religion) in the Magazine "Urdu," Volume 5 part 17, of January 1925. This very learned scholar examines the question with a wealth of learning and detailed investigation which are truly admirable. He makes out a powerful case for holding that Firdousi, contrary to the generally accepted belief, was imbued with Sunni doctrines. But he partly bases his argument upon verses, some at least of which are of extremely doubtful authenticity. Perhaps Āshūb-i-Turāni, whom the learned Professor quotes, uttered a deeper truth than he meant, when he said scoffingly of Firdousi:

Na Sunni na Shi'i na Mugh nay Yahūd,
Na Tarsa nadānam tura dīn che būd.

"You are neither Sunni nor Shia, neither Magian, Jew nor Christian; Heaven knows what creed you professed!"

Though no Sufi, Firdousi's utterances display the same

breadth of spirit, large tolerance, and religious colourlessness, as the famous verse of Shams-i-Tabriz:

Che tadbīr ay Musalmānān, ki man khud-ra nami dānam,
Na Tarsa na Yahūdam man na Gibram na Musalmān-am

"What shall I do, O ye Faithful! For I do not know myself. I am neither Christian nor Jew, Zoroastrian, nor Mussalman!"

CHAPTER IX

PATRIOTISM.

Perhaps the most dominant note of Firdousi's poetry is its resonant and all-pervading patriotism. The Shahnama is in a breath the exultant hymn glorifying the land and people of Iran and a lament for their downfall—its dirge of despair. The poet has sung both the glorious achievements and the tragic downfall of his native land in unforgettable and soul-stirring strains. Both his pride in the vanished greatness and his sorrow over the ruin and decay of his beloved country are unfathomable and overpowering:

Derighast Irān ki wirān shawad,
Kenām-é pilangān-u shīrān shawad.
Hama jāy-é jangi sawārān budi,
Nishastangah-é shahryārān budi.
Kanun jāy-é sakhti-u jāy-é balāst,
*Nishastangah-é tīz-chung azdahāst.**

"Alas, alas that Iran should lie waste and become the lair of the leopard and the lion! It was the home of mighty warriors and the royal seat of great monarchs. Now it has become the scene of woe and want and the hunting ground of a blood-thirsty dragon."

The whole epic is inspired by a spirit of passionate patriotism, scarcely equalled in the history of literature. Love

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* It almost looks as if even in this verse Firdousi is thinking of Sultan Mahmud.—as in the famous passage describing the plight of Iran after the overthrow of the Sassanian Empire.

Shavad banda-e bihunar Shahryar,
Nizhad-u buzurgi nayayad bikar.

"A worthless slave shall become King and birth and magnanimity will be of no avail"—It is significant that he uses here the identical expression which he applies to Mahmud in his laudatory verses in the Introductory portion:

Bibazm andarun asman-e wafast,
Birazm andarun tiz-chang azhdahast.

of Iran, devotion to its cause, reverence for its institutions, pride in its achievements, and unquestioning loyalty to its lawful sovereign, are the main springs of the poet's inspiration. No other long poem in the Persian language is inspired and informed by this spirit of Iranianism, which with Firdousi is indeed a religion. It is the master-bias of his life and genius. That is the chief reason why the poetry of Firdousi stirs and thrills the true Iranian as no other poetry does. Genuine and comprehensive patriotism is not a very strong point in Persian writers generally. The quality is not prominent even in poems dealing entirely with Iranian history or legend, like Nizami's Khusrav-Shirin or Fakhruddin Gurgani's Wis-o-Ramin. Among Firdousi's successors, patriotism tends to become provincial, as in the case of Saadi and Hafiz, or it is permitted to be blurred by the paramount claims of Islam. Firdousi alone among the singers of Iran made no concessions to other claims in the matter of his loyalty to Iran. To him Iran-worship is religion. The terms in which he exults in its triumphs, or bewails its downfall, glorifies its warriors, heroes, monarchs and martyrs, or execrates its enemies, are of matchless power. His vehement denunciation of Arabs in general is amazing when we consider the risk of persecution which he ran in those bigoted times. In his eyes the world never had and will never have anything to compare in glory and power with the sword of Iran and the throne of the Kayanians and Sassanians. There never were, nor shall be, on the face of the earth monarchs of the might and majesty of Farídún and Kay Khusrav, or warriors of the prowess of Rustam and Isfandiyár. And for Firdousi, when Iran fell before Arab aggression, the glory of kingship departed and the lamp of chivalry was extinguished for ever.

The kings of ancient Iran ruled by right divine. They were born kings, and the royal glory—what Firdousi refers to as *Farr-e-Kayán* and what is mentioned in the Avesta as *Kavaem Khareno* was a special heritage of the royal houses of Iran passing from father to son in the right line. Jamshíd had this glory first; but he forfeited it when he became vain and ungodly:

Chu in gufta shud farr-é Yazdān azūy,
Gusast-u jehān shud puraz guftagūy.

"When he had spoken these (impious) words, the divine glory was cut off from him, and a hubbub arose among the people."

It then passed to Farídun; and through Farídun, who is regarded as the fountain-head of Iranian royalty, it passed to Manuchehr, Naudhar, Kay Qubad, Kay Khusrav, throughout the Kayánian dynasty until its extinction. With the rise of the Sássánians it was recaptured by Ardashír, and remained with the Royal House of Sássán until, with the death of Yezdegird III, it was finally swallowed up in the black night of universal chaos.

This is the origin of the doctrine of the Divine Right of kings, which for ages remained a vital and potent factor in the politics of the East and of the West, and has not become altogether obsolete even in the unbelieving and prosaic times of today. Firdousi derived the idea from the ancient Avesta scriptures. The Zamyád Yasht, which is aptly described as a miniature epic, graphically describes the transmission of this divine symbol of royalty and its unsuccessful pursuit by alien aspirants. It is something objective, evidenced by a visible mark on the person of the king. Thus Kay Khusrav bares his body and displays the sign in support of his claim to the royal throne*. With Ardashír, the founder of the House of Sassan, it is represented as taking the shape of a ram and running away from Ardaván, the last Parthian ruler, who indeed pursues it, but fails; and it overtakes Ardashír and becomes the heritage of his house. In Avesta and Pahalvi writings it is represented by an eagle. This glory was the peculiar possession of Iranian royalty, and a source of strength and pride to the entire nation. The institution of monarchy all over the world was sanctified by this doctrine of divine right to rule, so eloquently expounded by Firdousi; and it has endured for all these centuries and still endures because of the prevalence of the principle with the masses of mankind.

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* *Bidu guft Giv ay sar-e sarkashan,*
Zi farr-e buzurgi che dari nishan?
Barahna tan-e khish binmud Shah,
Nigeh kard Giv an nishan-e siyah.
Ki mirath bud az gah-e Kay Qubad,
Durusti bidan bud Kayan-ra nizhad.

"Then spake Giv: "O leader of the brave, what evidence have you of the royal glory? The king then stripped open his body and Giv noticed that black mark, which was a heritage of royalty from the time of Kay Qubad, and which determined the royal heritage of the Kayanians".

Firdousi exalted Iran and its people by the vitality of his faith in this doctrine. According to him, as long as Iran remained under the aegis of the imperial race of Kayánians and Sassanians it prospered. While these heaven-born kings ruled the country it remained blest and victorious. The glory of Iran vanished with the throne of the Sassanians. Their blood was sacred. Their very hair exuded the scent of the imperial crown. Divine glory was reflected in their faces. They shone like the sun and the moon:

Kay-é nāmwar guft kinsān buwad,
Kasi ku aba farr-é Yazdān buwad!

* * * *

Hami būyé tāj āyad az mūy-é ouy,
Hami may chakad gūyi az rūy-é ouy.

* * * *

Zi khūn-é Kayān sharm dārad nihang,
Wagar kushta yābad naderrad pilang.

* * * *

Yaki yādgari zi Sāssāniyan,
Ki chun way nabandad kamar bar miyān.
Ki dar jang shīr ast-u bar takht shāh,
Farūzān bikirdār-é Khurshīd-u Māh.

"Then spake the noble monarch "Ah, such indeed are those on whom the glory of the Lord doth shine" (Afrásiyáb says this of Siáwash).... His very hair gives out the scent of the imperial crown. You might say the red wine trickles down from his ruddy face."

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"Even the fell crocodile would be ashamed to shed the blood of the royal Kayanian and the leopard would desist from tearing his dead body."

* * * *

"He (Yezdegird) is the last solitary memorial of the royal Sassanians, like whom none can ever gird the belt of royalty; who in battle is a lion and on the throne a Prince, shining and shedding light around like the Sun and the Moon."

Firdousi is out and out a legitimist, and the Shahnama inculcates absolute loyalty and whole-hearted devotion to the throne and person of the rightful king. This unquestioning

devotion and obedience of a free and brave people to their ruler is explicable when we bear in mind the divine right by which the Shahs of ancient Iran ruled. Once the rightful sovereign is established, the Iranian never swerves in his loyalty, and dedicates himself body and soul to his service. The greatest and most powerful warrior or chieftain never thinks of betraying him or usurping his rights. There are no traitors to the true sovereign. So long as a scion of the royal blood is available no man, however powerful, ever thinks of occupying the seat of royalty. Sám and Rustam both refuse the imperial crown although it is offered to them by the army and the assembled chiefs.

"To them replied Sām, "How would God approve this of me that, while there is one of royal Kayanian birth, like Naudhar, with the royal belt, upon the throne of kingship, I should wear the imperial crown? It cannot be and nobody would hear of it. Even if a daughter descended from Manuchehr were there with the crown upon this golden Throne, my head would rest nowhere except upon the dust under her feet, and my eyes would derive their joy from a sight of her. For my seat of honour is surely the dust under the feet of Manuchehr, and the hoof of Naudhar's steed is the crown upon my head."

Similarly, Rustam in his wrath says addressing Kay Kāus :

"The warlike chiefs desired me to assume the sovereignty; they prepared for me the throne and the diadem. But I refused to cast my eyes upon the royal seat. I observed only the customs and usages of my people. If I had accepted the throne and crown you would not today have this fortune and glory."

For one not of royal blood to aspire to the throne is against the Iranian's creed and code of honour. On the contrary, these mighty chiefs leave no stone unturned to discover the rightful heir, and when he is found do him unstinted homage and unreservedly lay their swords and services at his feet. The king is the king, and hardly any distinction is made between a good ruler and a bad, a wise one and a foolish one. Whether it is a Farīdūn or a Naudhar, a Kay Khusrav or a Kay Kāus,

it makes no difference to the quality and completeness of the Iranian's allegiance to his sovereign. It is an article of faith and runs throughout the course of Iranian history from Jamshīd to Yezdegird. The king's commands, proper or improper, are to be implicity obeyed. Nobody argues with Jamshīd when he turns vain and ungodly, with Kay Kaūs when he launches upon hare-brained and disastrous expeditions. Isfandiyár sees the iniquity, and the gross unfairness and sinister purpose of his royal father, Gushtāsp's command, but obeys it none the less. It is only the unique power and prestige of the House of Sām, which entitles and enables its representatives, on extreme occasions, to stand up to and remonstrate with the king. Thus Rustam turns upon Kay Kaūs when the latter, forgetful of all obligations which Rustam has heaped upon his head, disgraces him in open court. But even he, although for the moment carried away by his righteous indignation towards the King's ingratitude and folly, as soon as he is persuaded to return, apologises and humbly offers his services. Thus again Zāl stands up before Kay Khusrav and taxes him with conduct unworthy of Kayānian Kings, when the latter, at the end of his career, proposes to renounce the throne and the world. Throughout the history of the Pishdādians, Kayānians and Sāssānians, there is no major revolt against the authority of the rightful sovereign, until the later Sassanian times when decadence has already set in, and the Iranians have begun to lose the faith and morals of their fathers. The revolt of Kāwah is against an alien usurper and tyrant. The revolt of Bahrām Chūbin, as it indicates the deterioration of this loyal faith, also inaugurates the decay and disintegration of the Parsi Empire. Still, even in the last throes of the dying empire, the loyal devotion of the commander of the armies of Iran to the person of the last representative of the Imperial House of Sāssān, shines like a star in the gathering gloom. Rustam Farrukhzād, the commander of the armies of Iran, while his faith in the star and sword of Iran is shaken, writes to his brother to stand by and shield the person of the king at all costs :

Chu giti shawad tang bar Shahryār,
Tu ganj-u tan-u jān girāmi madār.
Kezin tukhma-é nāmdār arjumand,

Namāndast juz Shahryār-é buland.
Bikūshish makun eech susti bikār,
Bigīti juz-u nīst parwardigār.
Zi Sāssānian yādgār oust-u bas,
Kizin pas nabīnad azin tukhma kas.
Du dīda zi Shah-é Jehān bar madār,
Fida kun tan-e khīsh dar kārzār.
Darīgh in sar-u tāj-u in mihr-u dād,
Ki khwāhad shudan takht-é shāhi bibād!
Tu pidrūd bāsh-u biazar bash,
Hamīsha bipīshé Jehāndār bāsh.
Gar oura bad āyad tu shav pīshé ouy,
Bishamshīr bispār purkhāsh jūy.
Tura ay birādar tan abad bad,
Dil-é Shāh-é Iran bi tu shād bad!

"While your king is in dire distress, do not hold dear your possessions, and even your body and soul. For, of this illustrious and noble House, none has survived except His Exalted Majesty. Do not be remiss in your service and efforts, for only he is our preserver on Earth. He is the only memorial left of the royal Sassanians, for after him none of this noble line will be left. Alas and alas, for this head and Crown, this mercy and justice, for assuredly this royal seat will be swept away! Fare thee well! Be thou ever free from harm and devoted to the service of the Lord of the World. Should evil approach him do thou stand before him and strike the avenger with thy sword. May thy person, Oh my brother, be safe and sound, and may the heart of our royal Master rejoice in thee! Do not for a moment take thy eyes off the King, and sacrifice thy body in his defence upon the field of battle."

Similary, Gustaham, mortally wounded in battle, has only one desire, just to see his king's face before he dies:

Mara bād chandān hami ruzgār,
Ki bīnam yaki chihra-é Shahryār!

"May I just live to see for one moment the face of my sovereign."

This sentiment has influenced the entire history of Iran from its dawn to the present day. Given the rightful king

whose throne is established, either in the purity of his lineage or the glory of his achievements, the devotion of the Iranians knows no bounds.

Chunin guft mubed ki in tāj-u takht,
Nayābad magar mardum-é nīk bakht,
Ki dārad kaf-é rād-u furr-é nizhād,
Khiradmand-u roushandilu pur zi dād.

"Thus spake the Múbed, this crown and throne can be acquired only by a man of virtue and blessed fortune, whose palm is liberal, who has a glorious lineage, who is wise, with an enlightened mind and full of justice."

The king is under the special protection and guidance of God. The Divine Power keeps a watch upon the true representative of the royal line and preserves his life. Thus, Dārāb sleeping under a ruined arch, is roused by a divine voice in the nick of time before the arch collapses and falls :

Ki ay tāq-é āzurdé hūshyar bāsh,
Barin Shāh-é Iran nigihdār bāsh!

"Beware, thou broken arch ! preserve this king of Iran while he sleeps !" In fact, the voice warns the tottering arch to hold firm until the king rises and departs.

According to Firdousi, not only during the heroic ages, but even in historic times, ancient Iran enjoyed a degree of prosperity and magnificence which became a dream only after the overthrow of the ancient monarchies and the establishment of foreign rule. Thus in the time of Noushirwān, Iran is described in these glowing words:

"The monarch toured his territories and found the whole land under cultivation and full of flocks and herds. Even arid tracts which had never been ploughed before were covered with crops, and the homes of the cultivators rang with the happy laughter of children. By the glory and blessed fortune of the king, the trees were loaded with fruits, and by his justice and beneficence the earth became fair and fertile, like paradise. The world rested from warfare and bloodshed. There was no looting and plundering. Such was the terror of royal justice that if treasures lay scattered on the highroad,

nobody dared cast an avaricious glance upon the unguarded gold. Iran became like blessed Paradise; its earth was like ambergris and its bricks were of gold. It would be right if the dead became alive again, for now Noushirwan rules the world. The air rained rose-drops instead of dew, and the people knew neither malady nor medicine. The rains rained in their due season, and the peasants' hearts were never in distress about the weather. Hill and dale, hall and cottage, were covered with flowers and the whole land with verdure and cattle. The rivers spread out like the seas and the flower-beds glittered like the Pleiades. Languages were taught to the people and their minds were illuminated with learning."

Such was the Iran of Firdousi's dream and it is noteworthy that he attributes its glory and prosperity to royal grace and justice :

So also in the time of Bahrām Gūr, Iran is a picture of prosperity and pleasure and plenty.

The manner in which the poet speaks of Farídun and his court is typical of Firdousi's lofty conception of Iranian royalty :

Chu chashmash birūy-é Faridun rasīd,
Hama dida-u dil pur az shāh dīd.
Bibālay-é sarv-u chu Khurshīd rūy,
Chu kāfur mūy-u chu gul surkh-rūy!
Du lab pur zi khanda du rukh pur zi sharm,
Kayāni zabān pur zi guftār-é narm.
Firistadé guft ān ki roushan bahār,
Nabīnad bibīnad dar-é Shahryār!
Bahārast khurram dar andar bihisht,
Hame khāk amber hame zarsh khisht,
Sipihr-e barin khāk-é aiwān-e oust,
Bihisht-é barin rūy-é khandān-é oust.
Chu raftam binazdīk-é aiwān farāz,
Sarash ba sitāreh hami guft rāz.

"As soon as he looked at Farídun he saw all eyes and all hearts intent upon the royal presence. In stature like the cypress, in countenance like the Sun; red like the rose his royal face, and camphor-white his hair. His lips full of

laughter, and his cheeks suffused with modest glow, full of soft speech his royal tongue. Then spake the messenger, 'let him who hath not seen the resplendent spring look at this royal court. It is the blessed spring of Paradise. Its earth is all ambergris, its bricks all gold. The lofty firmament is its floor, and his smiling face our highest heaven. When I approached the royal palace, its head seemed to confer with the stars'."

So also even the last luckless monarch of ancient Iran, on the brink of the catostrophe which was soon to overwhelm him and his empire, is spoken of in these terms:

Haran gih ki bar gāh khandān shawad,
Gushāda lab-u sīm dandān shawad,
Bibakshshad bahā-é sar-é tāziyan,
Ki ganjash zi bakhshish nayābad ziyān.

"Whenever he laughs upon his royal seat opening his lips and displaying his silver teeth, he can give away at a stroke the price of all the Arab heads, for his treasures cannot be impaired by his bounties, however extravagant."

The effect of the poet's burning patriotism is his hatred of the enemies of Iran. His prejudice against the Turanians and the Arabs, the traditional enemies of Iran, is evident in almost every page that he wrote. He frequently mentions the Turk and the Tazi with the utmost aversion and contempt.

This anti-Arab bias is obvious, not only in the final passages of his epic where he describes the incursion of the Arab hordes upon Iran, but in his making out Zahhāk the tyrant, an enemy of God and man, to be an Arab, apparently without any authority from the Avesta and Pahlavi scriptures. He invests the original ancient name Azhi Dahāk with an Arabic form Zahhāk (which means laughing, scoffing.)*

The sentiments which he puts into the mouth of Rustam Farrukhzād, the commander of the Iranian forces at the battle of Qādasiya, are imbued with deep hatred of the people who destroyed the glory of Iran:

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* Thus Khaqani plays upon the word *Zahhak* in its double sense in the following verse:
Khush khanda-u zihr-pash madam,
Zahhak dihan-u azhdaha kam.
"(Speaking of the murderous desert brigands) Sweet smiling and pouring poison always with a laughing (*Zahhak*) mouth and the serpent's jaws (alluding to the serpents on *Zahhak's* shoulders.")

Azin mār-khār āhriman chehrigan,
Zi dānā-i-u sharm bi bihragān,
Azin zāghsārān-é bi ab-u rang,
Na hūsh-u na dānish na nām-u na nang.

"These snake-eating, black-visaged demons, devoid of all wisdom and shame, these wretched ugly crows, without repute, name, fame, learning or knowledge!"

And again:—

Zi shīr-é shutur khurdan-u susmār,
Arab-ra bijāyi rasidast kār,
Ki takht-é Kāyān-ra kunad ārzūy,
Tufu bād bar charkh-é gardān tufūy!

"From living on camel's milk and the green lizard the ambition of the wild Arab has mounted so high that he presumes to aspire to the throne of the Kayánians! O fie on this revolving sky, O fie!"

But in spite of this ill-concealed prejudice Firdousi in several places does justice to the simple living and manly virtues of the Arabs. Thus, the Arab emissary to the Iranian camp just before the battle of Qādasiya, in spite of the disadvantages of his position, ill-clad, ill-armed, ill-mounted as he was, in the midst of a splendid camp hung with silk brocades and cloth of gold, speaks with simple dignity and incisive directness as a true son of the Desert:

Chunin guft Shu'aba ki ay nīknām,
Agar din padhīri Alayk-us-Salām!

"Then answered Shu'aba short, 'O my good man, if you accept our creed then God's peace be upon you!' "

Much earlier, as far back as the time of Faridun, the free and independent spirit of the Arabs is thus described:

"The brave, experienced chiefs, each one of them, spoke thus to their king: 'We all unanimously are of the view that it is not right for you to be blown about by every breeze that blows. If Farídún is a mighty monarch, we too are not ringed slaves.* Our custom is to sing poetry and fight, and our

* Slaves have rings in their ears in token of their bondage.

creed consists in sporting the spear and the reins of our chargers. We can cover the earth with red wine (blood) with our poniards, and with our whistling javelins, we can turn the air into a bed of reeds."

CHAPTER X

PURITY.

One of the greatest claims of Firdousi to our reverence and admiration lies in the high moral tone and absolute purity of his work. This is a rare quality in a poem of the character and magnitude of the Shahnama; and in this respect Firdousi stands almost alone among the great poets of the world. From the beginning to the end there is not a single passage or situation that is obscene or unhealthy. There is not one verse among the thousands which he wrote that can be called morbid, immoral or base. However ardent and amorous a situation may be, Firdousi never transgresses the limits of decency and never descends to pruriency of any sort. Thus, the love scenes between Zāl and Rudābeh, Rustam and Tahmina, and Bezhun and Manijeh, are all kept within due bounds; and there is hardly an expression to which exception may be taken.

Even when he has to describe an ugly thing he presents it in a decent and decorous garb:

The licence of irresponsible copyists has resulted in some shameless lines being interpolated in the text of the Shahnama. But Firdousi never wrote them.

The poem from a moral and even aesthetic standpoint is immaculate; and constitutes a unique achievement. In his age and country it seems almost superhuman. Some of the noblest works in the Persian language are disfigured by passages of the most morbid and repulsive kind. In the "spiritual" Masnavi of Rūmi, for instance, there are passages which are sheer filth. Even in writers of the position of Saadi, and Jāmi—revered as saints or Sufis—there are whole chapters so utterly obscene, that one can hardly imagine how persons perpetrating them can for a moment maintain the reputation of saints. Firdousi never posed as saint or Sufi; yet his

great poem is spotless. Nor is literary filth confined to the literature of Iran. It is found in the secular literatures of almost all peoples. Even in the English, which is the most severe and least scandalous of all, literary purity is a matter of recent growth. Only the 19th century could produce a Wordsworth or a Tennyson. England's greatest poets—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, even Milton—are not absolutely pure. Nobody claims any exceptional purity or moral elevation for Chaucer or Shakespeare. Spenser's taste is defective and the Faerie Queene contains detailed descriptions of disgusting things. Even the austere and majestic Milton is not free from disagreeable and repulsive descriptions (e.g. his allegory of Sin and Death.) Goethe, like Shakespeare, is a master of all human experiences and does not hesitate to describe a thing from merely moral considerations. In Western letters, Scott is the really great exception in this respect. With all the wide compass and variety of his work in prose and verse, he too never wrote anything obscene or unhealthy. Be that as it may, in Persian Literature it is certain that the Shahnama is the only great work of importance which is absolutely free from all kind of impurity and scandal. There was plenty of scope for dangerous writing in a poem like the Shahnama. There are any number of ardent scenes and situations. Firdousi's greatness is to be seen in his treatment of them, in the restraint and dignity which he has observed in spite of the tempting and transporting nature of his theme.

Take the meeting of Zál and Rudabeh. The situation though ardent is never permitted to transgress the bounds of decency and decorum. The voluptuous scene in which Sudābeh tries to seduce her step-son Siāwush, is also kept within due bounds.

"When Siāwush entered the harem he saw a seat of resplendent gold decorated with turquoise and royal brocade. The moon-faced Sudābeh reclined upon the seat like the shining Canopus of Yemen, full of colour and fragrance like a veritable garden. Her ringlets in front were full of curls; she had a lofty tiara upon her head; and her hair behind hung down to her heels like a lasso of musk. As soon as Siāwush appeared before the curtains, Sudābeh came down

from her seat, walked gracefully towards him and greeted him. She embraced him and for long held him against her breast, and lingeringly kissed him upon his face and eyes, as if she could never be satiated with his presence."

But even from the passionate lips of this abandoned woman, when she puts aside all shame and declares her love, the words that fall are not abandoned and shameless:

Yaki shād kun dar nihāni mara,
Bibakhshāy rūzé jawāni mara.

"For once in secret fill me with joy and bestow upon me the day of youth."

Similarly, when a youth in female garb concealed among the women of the royal harem is detected, and the guilty pair are accused before Noushirwan, the hapless girl says with simple dignity in self-excuse:

Pidar mān juda mādar-é ma yakīst,
Azu bar tan-é man zi bad rāh nist.

"We are born of different fathers but of the same mother. No evil can proceed from him upon my person."

The humorous anecdote, in Bahrām Gūr's reign, about the cobbler youth, whose impotency was cured by drinking wine, although rather coarse, has really nothing immoral or prurient about it. The disappointed youth takes strong wine (which Bahrām had prohibited) under his mother's advice, achieves his desire and under the influence of the liquor is also able to overpower a lion that had got loose from the King's Zoo. Everybody is astonished at this marvellous feat, and surmises that he must be a descendant of renowned warriors. But the mother assures the King that all his ancestors were cobblers, and the power of his lineage lay in three cups of the prohibited wine:

Naya kafshgar bud pidar kafshgar,
Azān pīsha bartar nayāmad gohar!
Nizhādash nabud juz seh jām-é nabīd,
Ki dānist kin shah khwāhad shanīd?

"His father was cobbler and his grandfather was a cobbler. His lineage has never aspired to anything higher than this. The power of his ancestry has been due to three cups of wine. But who dreamt that the King would hear of this?"

CHAPTER XI

YUSAF-ZULEIKHA.

Firdousi's fame rests upon the Shahnama. Besides a few stray lyrical pieces, quoted in anthologies, like the Atash-Kadeh and Majma-ul-Fusaha, the only other considerable poem attributed to him is *Yusaf-Zuleikha*. This masnavi is alleged to have been composed by the poet during his flight from Ghazni after the completion of the Shahnama. The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife has been a favourite theme with Persian and Turkish poets. Jāmi's rendering is the best known; although other poets, both in Persian and Turkish, have also tried their hands upon the subject. If Firdousi's *Yusaf-Zuleikha* is genuinely of his composition, it would be the first notable rendering of the romance in Persian verse. It is generally assumed that it is Firdousi's work; but the matter is open to very serious doubt. To start with, it is a very poor performance, unworthy not only of so great a master as Firdousi, but even of any standard writer of Persian poetry. The question is not free from difficulty; but to judge by the quality of the verse, apart from other considerations, it can only be regarded either as a clumsy though audacious forgery, or the bitter and hurried product of a tired and unwilling mind in its dotage—the faint uncertain flicker of a failing light, assailed by dreary blasts of age, disappointment and distress, to be soon extinguished for ever. The main ground for ascribing this metrical exercise to the pen of Firdousi is an autobiographical passage at its commencement, describing the reasons which prompted its composition, and which contains the few energetic verses to be found in the whole work.

Although the masnavi is written in the same metre as the Shahnama, it has nothing of the purity, majesty and fluency of Firdousi's normal style. Not only is there no purple patch, no single passage reminiscent of the force, fire and

felicity of Firdousi's characteristic utterance, but the whole effort is crude and dull, falling below the level of even Daqiqi. Not only is it devoid of the characteristic graces of Firdousi's muse, but it possesses positive blemishes, a faulty and feeble diction, and defects of metre and rhyme, impossible in so great an artist as Firdousi. Granting that the poem could not be expected to rise to a high level, since the theme would have little inspiration for Firdousi, still there is no explanation for the bleak poverty of thought and language, and solecisms of grammar and rhyme, which disfigure it; unless it is to be assumed that the poet deliberately perpetrated such doggerel in a spirit of perverseness and embittered rage. The poet who considered Daqiqi's comparatively pure and fluent verses as scarcely deserving a place alongside his own composition, surely could not put forward this halting and prosaic performance as his own challenge to the Shahnama, as its preface professes it to be!

Apart from the internal evidence of style and diction, which by themselves seem to be conclusive, there are formidable external reasons for rejecting this masnavi as of Firdousi's composition. His oldest biographers make no mention of any *Yusaf-Zuleikha* composed by Firdousi. Neither Nizámi Arúzi, nor Awfi, nor Dowlatshah, refers to it. There is no allusion to any such poem in the writings of any of his great contemporaries or successors. Awfi, who laboriously collected the verses of all Iranian writers before his time, expressly says that Firdousi wrote little poetry besides the Shahnama. Neither he nor Nizámi Arúzi could overlook so considerable a work as the *Yusaf-Zuleikha* attributed to Firdousi, if it really existed and was known in their day. The oldest reference to this poem is in Bāisangharkhan's Preface which was composed several centuries after Firdousi, and which contains a good deal of insupportable and even fantastic fiction. Thereafter mention is made of this poem in various later anthologies and biographical works. Dowlatshah, however, although writing later, makes no mention of any such poem having been composed by Firdousi; not does Dowlatshah's contemporary, the great poet Jāmi, in his famous *Yusaf-Zuleikha* allude to Firdousi, which he certainly would have done, if it had been

accepted in his day that Firdousi had handled the subject before him. Jámi refers to the composition of his own poem in these terms:

"I shall utter the innermost secrets of my heart; I shall make the world laugh and weep. The story of Shírín and Khusrav has now become old; I shall instal a new sovereign (Khusrav) in the realm of sweetness (Shirini). The time of Leila and Majnun has passed by; I shall now establish another story (of love like theirs). I shall make my intellect chew sugar, like a parrot, with the beauty of Joseph and the love of Zuleikha. Since God (i. e. in the Qurán) called this story of Joseph the most beautiful of all romances, I shall try to narrate it in the loveliest manner possible."

The allusion here is to Nizāmi's Khusrav-Shirin and Laila Majnūn, and the Sūra of Yusaf in the Holy Quran. Towards the end of the poem also Jāmi mentions Nizāmi only.

It is unthinkable that Jāmi would not refer to Firdousi, if learned opinion in his time had ascribed the composition of the story of Joseph in Persian verse to Firdousi. Jāmi, it should be remembered, besides being one of the great classics of Iranian poetry, was also a man of great learning and extensive scholarship.

But many scholars like Ethé after a careful survey of the entire question consider that this poem of Yusaf and Zuleikha is rightly ascribed to Firdousi. They seem to base their conclusion, mainly on this, that there is a great similarity between several portions of *Yusaf-Zuleikha* and of the Shahnama, e. g. the untimely death of Rahil and the birth of Benjamin; and secondly, that it is written in the *taqārub* metre which is the metre of the Shahnama, appropriate to heroic poetry, but quite unsuitable to poetry of love. It is pointed out that all subsequent poets, from Fakhruddin Gurgāni in his *Vis-o-Rāmin*, to Shaukat in his *Yusaf-Zuleikha*, have never employed the *taqārub* metre for love romances; and it is argued that if this *Yusaf-Zuleikha* were the composition of a later poet, he inevitably would have employed the *Hazaj* metre of *Vis-o-Rāmin*, Nizāmi's *Khusrav-Shirin* and Jāmi's *Yusaf-Zuleikha*. It is also pointed out that the later poets in their treatment of these love stories invariably

introduce Sufi mysticism; from which both the Shahnama and this poem are entirely free.

The most powerful argument, however, is founded upon certain 'autobiographical' passages in *Yusaf-Zuleikha* itself. In one of them, (found only in one manuscript copy) the poet refers to two previous writers *viz.*, Abu Muáyyad of Balkh, and Bakhtyāri of Ahwāz, who had versified the Sura of Yusaf in the 12th chapter of the Qurān, at the request of the Amir of Iraq. These two are very obscure poets; and, till recently, were hardly known even by name in Iran. They flourished in the 4th century of the Higera era, not long before Firdousi's time; and although naturally remembered by him would be most unlikely to be known to later writers.

The argument is further strengthened by another autobiographical passage in which Firdousi's own work in the region of ancient Iranian history is directly referred to. It is almost the only place in the whole poem which contains a few strong verses reminiscent of Firdousi's manner:—

Binazm awurīdam basi dāstān,
Az afsāna-u gufta-é bāstān,
Dilam sīr gasht az Faridun-é gurd,
Mara zān che ku takht-é Zahhāk burd?
Nadānam che khwāhad bidin juz adhāb,
Zi Kay Khusrav-u jang-é Afrāsiyāb!
Barin mi sazad gar bikhandad khirad,
Zi man khud kuja kay pasandad khirad,
Ki yak nīmé az umr-é khud gum kunam
Jehāni pur az nām-é Rustam kunam.
Dilam gasht sīr-u gireftam malāl
Hamaz pūr-é Kāus-u ham pūr-é Zāl.
Ki ān dāstānha durūgh ast pak,
Du sad zān nayarzad biyak musht-é khāk.
Bigūyīm aknun yaki dāstān,
Wa liken na az gufta-é bāstān.

"I have versified many a story from the ancient chronicles.

* * * * *

But I shall not sing any more these false fables, and shall not illuminate them with my poetry. I am fed up with

Faridun. What is it to me that he carried off the crown of Zahhak? I take off my heart from the Kingdom of Kay Qubad, and let the throne of Kaus be blown away by the winds. I do not know what will be the end of all this talk about Kay Khusrav and the wars of Afrasiyab except torment of the spirit. It would be meet and proper if Reason should laugh and scoff at me for all this, that I should waste half my life in singing the praises of Rustam and filling the world with his fame. My heart is weary and I am fed up with both Kaus's son and Zal's son... All these stories are absolutely false, and not worth a handful of dust. I shall now sing a story, but not from the old chronicle."

If this passage is genuinely of Firdousi's composition there would be no doubt that this *Yusaf-Zuleikha* is his work.

But even here the passage really overshoots the mark. It is impossible to believe that there should be such a complete revulsion in his feelings that Firdousi would altogether condemn and even ridicule the labour of his lifetime, and express disgust at what he was well aware constituted the glory of literature for all time. "These stories are all altogether false; two hundred of them are not worth a handful of dust!" The writer protests too much to carry conviction. Firdousi believed firmly in the truth and literary value of his great poem. For he says in the Shahnama:

Tu inra durūgh-u fisāna madān,
Biyaksān ravish dar zamāna madān.

"Do not consider all this as mere falsehood and fable. Do not think that the world always goes on in the same fashion."

The description of the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rahil is referred to as worthy of the author of the Shahnama:

But there is, nothing particularly brilliant about the passage, and it is not only far below the level of Firdousi but even that of a second-rate poet of Iran, ancient or modern, like say, Asadi or Hātifi.

On the other hand, take the passage in which Joseph pleads for his life and prays for a drink of water from his

murderous brothers; and compare it with the parallel episode of Iraj and his brothers in the Shahnama and see the difference:

Bibin tafāwat-é rih az kujā'st ta bikuja.

It is almost sacrilege to believe that Firdousi could perpetrate in such a context the bathos:

Burukh bar tapānche zadash chār-u panj,
Ki bud hamchu dandāna-é mār-é ganj.

"He struck four or five slaps upon his face which were like the teeth of the serpent (guarding the treasure)."

On the other hand, it must be admitted that there are a few single lines which, if not taken wholesale from the Shahnama, are clear echoes of Firdousi's manner:

Gusasta zi man mihré kayhān khadīv,
Gireftār gashtam zi farmān-é dīv.
Na jāy-é gurīz-u na pāy-é dirang,
Nadarmān-é udhr-u na sāmān-é jang.

But by themselves they prove nothing. Imitating Firdousi's manner of expression in single lines and isolated passages is by no means beyond the reach of ordinary versifiers in Persian. I am unable to find in this composition any considerable passage worthy of the author of the Shahnama; while, on the other hand, there are positive blemishes, so disfiguring and so numerous, that one cannot help hesitating before accepting a tradition unsupported by any contemporary authority.

Noldeke, like Browne, is content to accept Ethe's opinion that this Masnavi is the genuine work of Firdousi. But neither of them independently and critically examines the poem. The late Professor Mahmūd Khan Sherāni of Islāmia College, Lahore, discusses the whole question with extraordinary skill and learning in a paper contributed to the magazine, "Urdu". I am pleased to find that after a critical examination of the subject he comes to the same conclusion as the one I reached long ago from a bare perusal of the poem ascribed to Firdousi. The most valuable and suggestive portion of Professor Sherāni's critique is his detailed examination of the

linguistic peculiarities of the Shahnama and *Yusaf-Zuleikha* which, in my opinion, seems to prove almost conclusively that this poem is not the work of the author of the Shahnama.

CHAPTER XII.

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.

If we put aside the *Yusaf-Zuleikha* attributed to Firdousi as of doubtful authenticity, the Shahnama practically embraces the entire output of Firdousi's genius. There is no mention in the earlier notices of the poet of any other poems composed by him. On the contrary, as stated above, Awfi expressly says that outside the Shahnama hardly any poetry of Firdousi has been noticed. But the labours of devoted admirers have resulted in unearthing a few lyrical fragments which are believed to have proceeded from his pen. None of them bears in any marked degree the stamp of his splendid genius, or displays any particular power of thought or felicity of phrase. They are, however, pleasing and graceful, and there are no valid reasons to doubt their genuineness. Numerous passages in the Shahnama bear testimony to Firdousi's lyric powers; and it is indeed a pity that these few fragments are all the specimens we possess of his separate songs. Dr. Ethe has excellently edited this part of our author's literary output and the curious reader is referred to his edition. For our purposes a few examples will serve :

Shabi dar barat gar biyāsūdami,
Sar-é fakhr bar āsmān sūdami.
Qalam dar kaf-é Tīr bishkastami,
Kulāh as sar-é māh birbūdami.
Biqadr az nahum charkh bugzashtami,
Bipay farq-é gardūn bifarsūdami.
Jamāl-é tu gar zān ki man dārami.
Bijāy-é tu gar zān ki man būdami.
Bibichāragān rahmat āwurdami
Bidarmāndigan bar bibakhshūdami.

* * * * *

Falak gar bizīr-é naqāb andar ast,
Wagar zīr-é purr-é ugāb andar ast.

Mapindār ku az pay-é kār-é tu,
Biband-é khata-u sawāb andar ast.
Agar bad kuni kayfarsh khud bari
Na chashm-é zamāna bikhwāb andar ast,
Bar aiwānha nām-é Bezhun hanūz
Bizindān-é Afrasiyāb andar ast.

* * * *

Biya bigūy ki Purwiz az zamāna che khurd,
Burav bipurs ki Kasra zi ruzgār che burd.
Garu gireft mamālik bidigaran bugzāsht.
Warin nihād khazāin bidigarān bispurd.

* * * *

Basi ranj didam basi gufta khwāndam,
Zi guftār-é tāzi-u az pahalwāni.
Bi chandin hunar shast-u du sāl būdam,
Ki tūsha baram z'āshkār-u nihāni.
Bijuz hasrat-u juz wabāl-é gunāhān
Nadāram kanun az jawāni nishāni
Biyād-é jawāni kanun mūya dāram,
Barān bayt-é Būtāhir-é Khusravāni.
Jawāni man az kūdaki yād dāram.
Derigha jawāni, derigha jawāni !

* * * *

Hakim gufi kasi-ra ki bakht wāla nist,
Bihīch rūy mar-oura zamāna jūya nist
Buruv mujāwar-é darya nishin magar rūzi
Bidastat uftad durri kujaash hamta nist.
Khujaste dargah-é Mahmūd-é Zāwuli daryāst.
Chigūna darya kānra kirāna payda nist.
Shudam bidarya ghūta zadam nadīdam durr,
Gunāh-é bakht-é manast in gunāh-é daryā nist.

* * * *

Ta chand nihi bar dil-é khud gussa-u dard,
Ta jam'a kuni sīm-é sapid-u zar-é zard,
Zan pīsh-ki gardad nafas-é garm-é tu sard,
Ba dūst bikhur ki dushmanat khwāhad khurd

PART II

THE POEM

CHAPTER XIII.

PERSIAN POETRY

Persian literature is among the most ancient of living literatures. There has been for a thousand years an unbroken continuity of literary masterpieces; and such is the vitality of the language that even the earliest of these is scarcely obsolete or even obscure today. Unlike the French which is strong in prose and weak in poetry, Persian literature is prolific in verse, poor in prose. Such is the genius of the language—what Professor Cowell has called "a fatal facility for rhyme"—that it is actually easier to produce tolerable verse than good vigorous prose in Persian.

The main types of Persian poetical composition are the Masnavi, the Qasīda, the Ghazal, and the Rubāi. The Masnavi is a long descriptive, narrative or didactic composition in rhymed couplets, in one of the recognised Masnavi metres. Firdousi's Shahnama, Nizāmi's Khamsa or the Five Poems, Attār's Muntaq-ut-Tayr, Rūmi's Masnavi, and Jāmi's Yusuf-Zuleikha are some of the more famous Masnavis. The Qasida, or panegyric poem, constitutes the staple output of the professional court-poet, whose theme is the praise of princes and nobles. It runs from about 20 to 120 lines, with a single rhyme running throughout, and may be composed in various metres. Generally the qaside consists of two parts, a descriptive or lyrical opening, and the panegyric proper. The former often contains gorgeous descriptions and magnificent flights of the imagination, at the end of which by a clever transition, (technically called "guriz" or "flight") the poet plunges into the praise proper. This latter almost invariably consists of exaggerated and insincere glorification of the patron. Anvari, Zahīr-e-Fāryabi, Khāqāni, Salmān-e-Sauji, and Qāāni are among the great masters of the Qasida.

The Ghazal is perhaps the most characteristic form of Persian poetry. It is a much shorter piece, normally from 7

to 17 verses, with one prevailing rhyme and may be written in any recognized metre. It typifies the songs and lyrical outbursts of a pleasure-loving but rather pessimistic people, and normally deals with love, wine, the rose, the nightingale, and an imaginary or absurdly idealised Beloved. A great many of the ghazals are artificial and insincere, spinning out hackneyed and worn-out conceits and images, and posses small merit, apart from the wonderful music of the language. But the work of some of the great masters of the ghazal, like Sāādi, Hāfiz, and Shams-i-Tabrīz, is sublimated by a strain of Sufi philosophy and mysticism; and the poem often gains immensely in depth and dignity, by reason of the secondary mystical meaning underlying the apparently shallow and sickening sentimentalism of the standard love-lyric.

The Rubāi, or the Quatrain, consists of four lines, three of which, 1st, 2nd, and 4th, (sometimes all four), must rhyme, and it may only be written in one of the irregular Rubāi metres. It is a rugged and vigorous type, and each rubái necessarily deals with a single separate idea. But frequently there is a series harping on the same string. Omar Khayyām is, of course, the greatest as also the best known exponent of the Rubāi.

There are other kinds of Persian poetic compositions but they are mere matters of form, and may be disregarded. There is no blank verse in Persian. On the contrary, even prose is at times both rhymed and rhythmic.

The tyranny of tradition and the inability to depart from established types of literary composition have been responsible for a great waste of literary talent in over-worked fields. In particular, the qasida and the ghazal have diverted the splendid genius of a very intellectual and imaginative people into barren, beaten paths which lead nowhere. In the result, the bulk of Persian poetical literature is, in a sense, ephemeral; and both the unquestioned intellect of the people, and a language that responds nobly to the expression of every nuance of thought and feeling, however subtle or sublime, have been spent upon hackneyed and artificial types and topics. In prose also the Iranians have traversed narrow customary fields, like history, biography or ethics; whereas

other important departments, like the novel, the essay, and the drama, have been barely touched. In fact, the Persian mind has been too much tied down to the past and its free movement hampered by trammels of tradition and custom. But the old order is changing. Iran now appears to have awakened from its sleep of ages. It has in some measure fallen in with the current of modern progress, and established contacts with the social, political and intellectual movements of the Western world; and signs are not wanting of an intellectual and moral emancipation which may result in a fresh renaissance of Persian letters.

According to the Iranians themselves, as we have already noted, there have been three great 'prophets' in the realm of letters, Firdousi, Anvari and Sāādi, each supreme in the sphere of Masnavi, Qasida and Ghazal respectively. A fourth name is also added to these; and it is said that the lofty edifice of Persian poetry is held up by four mighty pillars, these three and Nizámi Ganjavi. Persian literature is best known to the outside world by these and two or three other names; Rūmi, Hāfiz, Jāmi and Omar Khayyām. However, while Omar's fame is greatest of all outside Iran, in his own country he is scarcely ever placed by the side of these great masters of Persian poetry. Until Fitzgerald's Omar took Europe and America by storm and Iran by surprise, Khayyām was better known as an astronomer and a mathematician than a poet in the land of his birth. Anvari, on the other hand, who is scarcely known in Europe or America even by name, is esteemed very high by his countrymen; and his qasidas are regarded as the high-water mark of this species of composition. He is unquestionably one of the masters of the Persian language and of the poetic art, excelling in the forms and figures, artifices and intellectual subtleties, so characteristic of the Persian genius. But the qasida is really untranslateable. Its beauties are wholly lost, if not indeed transformed into grotesque absurdities, as soon as it is clothed in a foreign garb.

Sāādi of Shirāz is the most popular, prolific and versatile of Persian writers. He left hardly any style of literary composition, except the epic, untouched; and certainly did not touch any that he did not adorn. Unlike the others, he

excelled in prose as well as in verse; and his compositions are distinguished by a standard of elegance and lucidity unrivalled and unapproached in the Persian language. His *Gulistān* and *Bustān* are both classics and models of Persian prose and verse, which though often imitated, have never been surpassed.

Nizāmi's Khamsa, or the "Five Poems", has also been regularly imitated, but has held its ground in spite of repeated challenges by great writers. Of these, one deals with Sufi philosophy and mysticism, and the other four with the loves and adventures of Khusrav and Shirin, Leila and Majnūn, Bahrām Gūr, and Alexander the Great respectively. Both Amir Khusrav and Jāmi have essayed similar poems which are popular and not without power.

Another literary name which is held in the highest veneration by the Iranians is Jalāluddin Rūmi—perhaps the greatest exponent of the Sufi doctrine in Persian, although he himself modestly accords precedence to Sanāi and Attār :

Attār ruh būd-u Sanāi du chashm-é ou.
Ma dar pay-é Sanāi-u Attār āmadim.

"Attār was the soul and Sanāi its two eyes; we are merely following in the wake of Sanāi and Attār."

Rúmi is famous for his great didactic poem the *Masnavi;* but his ghazals, written under the nom-de-plume, Shams-i-Tabrīz, are among the finest and most powerful in the language.

His "Divine" *Masnavi* is a gigantic poem in six volumes, a great repository of learning, philosophy, anecdote, theology, and Sufi doctrines. It is a very unequal work, consisting alternately of the most magnificent flights of poetry, bare theological disquisitions, and trivial and even obscene anecdotes.

Hāfiz of Shirāz is another very potent and popular name in the literature of Iran. His Sáqi-nama, in the metre of the Shahnama, is well known, though some people regard it as spurious. But it is his ghazals or love lyrics that constitute his chief claim to literary renown. They are characterised by a power and passion, charm and music, not possessed in an

equal measure by any other ghazals. And a few of them are deeply imbued with the spirit of Sufi mysticism.

Among the masters we have mentioned, in the estimation of the Iranians themselves, Firdousi alone is really supreme and unapproachable in his own sphere. It is pointed out that while Hāfiz can challenge comparison with Sāādi, Khāqāni or Zahīr with Anvari, and Jāmi or Amir Khusrav with Nizāmi, in their respective spheres, there is no name in the literature of Iran that can be mentioned in the same breath with Firdousi. He is as unquestionably supreme in Persian literature as Homer in Greek, or Shakespeare in English. And his supremacy in the realm, of Iranian letters is almost universally acknowledged in the land of his birth.

Firdousi's fame rests upon the Shahnama. It is a versified history of Iran from the earliest times to the overthrow of the Sassanian Empire. It is a gigantic poem in rhymed couplets, half history, half legend. The traditional 60000 couplets mentioned by the poet himself are not to be found in any of the extant texts of the Shahnama, which range between about 44000 and 54000 verses. In large portions the Shahnama is mere chronicle and has long passages which are insufferably dull and tedious. There is a good deal of repetition of phrases and figures, of sentiment and situation, of simile, metaphor, and moral reflections. Some of his fables are crude and grotesque. He has no clear conception of geography or of history. Owing to its inordinate length and monotony, as Macan has noted, the Shahnama, like the Paradise Lost, is more praised than read, both in Iran and in India. According to Sir Gore Ousley, even in so literary a circle as the court of Fath Ali Shah Qājār, not one man was able to point out a famous verse of the Shahnama, on which depended the truth of a well-known tradition connected with the poet's death.

But all these real blemishes pale into insignificance in the presence of a creative power so colossal as his. When he is writing at his best Firdousi attains almost the perfection of poetic expression. He has both invention and style, imagination and expression, the two pre-eminent requisites of great poetry. The great episodes and characters which he created have passed into universal literature. He is also the creator of

countless felicitous figures and phrases which have enriched and passed into the current usage of the Persian language. Any heart responsive to the poetic impulse and tolerably acquainted with the language, must feel the haunting melody of his poetry and its elevating and inspiring quality. By eschewing the Arabic element in the language, he imposed an artificial restraint upon himself. Yet he wields his literary weapon with consummate power and supreme effect. The Iranian history and culture are preserved in his glowing pages in a shape of splendour and majesty beyond all comparison. His power is such that to the genuine Iranian the Shahnama is more than history, more than poetry. It is religion.

The Shahnama has probably suffered more than any other work of equal antiquity by reason of the ravages of time and ignorance and prejudices of scribes. Yet, looking to the length of period which has elapsed since it first saw the light of day, and the vicissitudes that have passed over the face of Iran in the interval, the wonder is, not that it should have suffered the mutilation that it has, but that it should have survived at all in a condition of preservation and integrity, which puts beyond cavil its title to be regarded as not only the greatest poem of Iran, but one of the greatest masterpieces of the world. This can only be attributed to its own wonderful vitality rather than to the fostering care of any external agency.

The Shahnama, as pointed out by the great English poet-critic, Theodore Watts-Dunton, partakes both of the epic of growth and the epic of art. It is both a national epos of the type of the Mahabharat or the Niebelungenlied, and the work of a single artist working from a central theme, like Tulsidās's Rāmāyana, or the Paradise Lost. Although Firdousi is, in a sense, the representative poet of Iran, he really far transcends the characteristic features of the Persian muse and the artistic temper of the Iranians. He is a universal and comprehensive genius, and his appeal is direct to the mind and soul of mankind in general. This breadth and universality is not to be found in an equal measure in any other Persian poet. This is what gives Firdousi the supreme place in the literature of Iran—above Nizāmi, Anvari, Sāādi and Rūmi,—and what makes the Shahnama "a standing wonder in poetic literature."

CHAPTER XIV

MASNAVIS.

The poetical literature of Iran is immeasurably vast and varied. The genius of the language is such that expression in rhyme and metre costs little intellectual effort. In other languages versification is the result of some labour and conscious art. To the Iranian it comes naturally and spontaneously. The ancedote about the shepherd boy, whom Sultan Sanjar overheard grazing camels in measured numbers, is typical of the facile aptitude of the Iranian genius to metrical composition:

Ushtur surāhi gardana,
Dānam che khwāhi kardana,
Gardan darāzi mi kuni,
Pumba bikhāhi khurdana.

But this easy and natural aptitude for versification, has itself made really great poetry rare and difficult of achievement. The writers of good verse according to the standard patterns are innumerable. Their name is legion, and their verses if collected, would run into astronomical figures. But the truly great poems are few and far between; and among them the Shahnama stands almost alone for sustained power. We must, for the moment, put aside the ghazals and the qasidas, which constitute nine-tenths of the bulk of Persian poetical literature, and consider the longer poems known as Masnavis.

The truly great Masnavi poems are surprisingly few in Persian. The Masnavis may be divided roughly into three great classes: (1) The Razmiya, heroic or epic proper, like the Shahnama; (2) The Ishqiya or romance, like Nizāmi's Khusrav-Shirin; and (3) The Akhlāqi or didactic and philosophical like Rūmi's *Masnavi.*

In class (1) there have been numerous metrical compositions in imitation of the Shahnama describing the exploits of various historical or legendary personages, but they are almost all forgotten. Only two have survived the oblivion of time and are worthy of being mentioned· Asadi's

Garshāsp-nama and Nizāmi's Sikandar-nama. The former was practically contemporaneous with the Shahnama and deals with the adventures of Garshāsp, one of the ancestors of Rustam. It contains many stray verses of great beauty and power some of which are quoted in the Āltash Kadah.

But on the whole it falls far below the level of Firdousi.

Nizāmi's Sikander-nama is the only long poem in the language which at all comes near the Shahnama in point of style and substance. Nizāmi is a great master of the language and poetic art; and he has handled an inspiring subject with consummate power. His hero is Alexander the Great, perhaps the most impressive historical personality of ancient times. Not content with his character as a mighty world-conqueror, Nizāmi has attempted to add to Alexander's stature by confusing him with the mythical scriptural figure of Dhul' Qarnain, who traversed the dark regions of the earth in quest of the "Water of Life." Nizāmi has invented many striking situations both romantic and heroic, and his verse maintains a high level of craftsmanship. But the poem fails to rise to the true height of epic power; and the verses lack the naturalness and spontaneity of Firdousi's poetry. The difference is the difference between the even and sparkling flow of a body of water through an artificial canal, with well laid-out gardens along its banks, and the free majestic movement of a mighty river running through a thousand different scenes of natural beauty and grandeur. Nizāmi's Alexander is an artificial and conventional figure lacking in flesh-and-blood reality. His battle-scenes though spirited are also artificial, and are in reality conscious copies of Firdousi's descriptions.

Nizāmi is really great in the second class of Masnavi poetry, Ishqiya or romances. He set the model for this kind of composition; and its popularity is evidenced by a host of imitations which appeared in its wake. Amir Khusrav, Jāmi, Hātifi, Faizi and other less known poets, tried their hands upon this type of composition, in imitation of Nizāmi, even attempting identical subjects, like Khusrav-Shírín or Leila-Mejnūn. But Nizāmi's Khamsa has maintained its precedence and supremacy. Putting apart exceptions like Jāmi's *Yusaf-Zuleikha* or

Faizi's *Nal-Daman*, the later Khamsas are feeble imitations, and Nizāmi's Khamsa remains the classic of its kind.

These romantic poems lack the height and compass of the epic, deal more with description and sentiment than with heroic action, and partake more of the nature of stories like those of Chaucer's or the romances of Byron, than the classics of Homer and Virgil.

Didactic, reflective or philosophical poems constitute the third class of Masnavi compositions. There are several outstanding examples of this kind of poetry in Persian literature, like Sanái's *Hadīqat-ul-Haqīqat*, Attár's *Muntiq-ut-Tayr*, *Gulshan-e-Rāz* by Shaikh Muhammad Shabestari, and the greatest of them all, Jalāluddin Rūmi's *Masnavi*. Most of these are strongly permeated by Sufi doctrines; and in the main consist of moral reflections and philosophic concepts poetically developed and illustrated by anecdotes.

Sāādi's *Bustān* stands in a category by itself. It is written in the metre of the Shahnama; it is, however, not a single poem, but a series of short poems describing anecdotes and incidents inculcating some moral lesson. Although it is exquisite in parts, and the whole is distinguished by an elegant and pellucid diction, it is impossible to place it alongside the Shahnama as great poetry. Saadi's greatness lies in the variety and versatility of his literary output in prose and rhyme, rather than in the sublimity of any single poem.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHAHNAMA

The Shahnama purports to be what its name imports, a chronicle of the Shahs of Iran from the earliest times to the final overthrow of the Sassanian Empire by the Arabs about 650 A.D. More than half its bulk is taken up by the exploits of legendary kings and warriors; and Firdousi is scarcely on firm historical ground until the accession of Ardashir, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, in 226 A.D. At any rate, he receives very slender support from contemporary or external records with regard to his narrative of the earlier Kayánian and Pishdadian dynasties: and none at all for the

exploits of the great house of Sám, centering around the mighty figure of Rustam. It does not follow that these stately and heroic personage, who stalk across the stage of Iranian history, are mere creations of his exuberant imagination. They existed in the national tradition; and although the sources of the Shahnama for pre-Sassanian times are now hardly available, there is no doubt at all that Firdousi was working on pre-existing materials even for his most extravagant episodes. In fact, the extravagance of an incident may be regarded as an indication that it is not purely of Firdousi's own imagining. The way in which he handles this material, crude and even puerile as it often was, furnishes a measure of the splendour of his genius. Thus introducing the bizarre episode of Akwán Div he says :

Tu bishnav zi guftār-é dihqān-é pīr,
Agarché nabāshad sukhun dilpadhīr.

"Listen now to the narrative of the ancient Dihqán, although his tale may not be agreeable to thy understanding."

Many of the great figures of the Pishdādian and Kayānian times find mention in the Avesta; Hushang, Tahmuras (Takhma-urupa), Jamshīd (Yima Kshaeta), Zahhāk (Azhi-daháka) Farīdun (Thraetaona), Manuchehr (Mainyush-chithra), Kai Kāus (Kava-usa), Kay-Khusrav (Kava-husrava), Afrāsiyāb (Frangrasyān), Gushtasp (Vishtaspa), Isfandiyar (Spento-dāta) and others, are all to be found in the sacred scriptures of the Parsis. The absence of any reference to these in foreign historians, like the Greeks, is scarcely an adequate reason for doubting their historical or traditional existence. The only perplexing hiatus is the practically complete absence of any allusion to so celebrated a figure as Rustam, both in the Avesta and in foreign records. The Armenian historian, Moses of Chorene, however, describes Rustam's exploits. Although Rustam owes his immortal fame to Firdousi's genius, he certainly had objective existence in the national tradition, before Firdousi made him the central character of his epic.

Shigifti bigīti zi Rustam basist,
Azu dāstān dar dil-é har kasist.

"The earth is full of Rustam's marvellous exploits, and people's hearts are filled with stories about him."

The story of Rustam's death Firdousi derived from a man called Āzād-Sarv, who himself claimed descent from Sām Narimān. The usual explanation that Rustam's name was deliberately excluded from Zoroastrian scriptures because he slew Isfandiyār, the protagonist of the Zoroastrian faith, is scarcely satisfactory. There was nothing to prevent the most zealous priestly scribe from condemning his name as an enemy of the faith, even as Azhi-Dahāka and Frangrasyān are anathematised in the scriptures, as enemies of Ahura-Mazda and of the Iranian people. Nor is the fact that the home of the House of Sām was in Zābulistan, (Afghanistan) outside the confines of modern Iran, any adequate reason for discarding Rustam from the genuine Iranian tradition. Ancient Iran certainly embraced the territories now designated as Afghanistan.

The other historical mystery in relation to the Shahnama is the non-existence in its patriotic pages of the great Achœmenian dynasty. Cyrus, Xerxes and Darius are conspicuous by their absence in the national epic of Iran; and the mighty dynasty of Hakhāmanīsh does not exist, except for a somewhat forced and fanciful identification of some of the noteable monarchs of the Kayānian dynasty, like Kay Khusrav and Gushtasp, with Cyrus and Darius Hystaspes. There is no satisfactory explanation for this glaring gap in the national history of Iran. The importance of the Achœmenian empire and the magnitude of the exploits of Cyrus and Darius can scarcely be exaggerated. Apart from the narratives of Herodotus, Ctesias, Xenophon, and others, there are the stately monuments and inscriptions of Persipolis. Firdousi's main sources, besides oral tradition, were Pahlavi records of Sassanian times. Such of these as have survived upto this day make no mention of Achœmenian history. The inscriptions were not known or understood in Firdousi's time and for centuries after. On the other hand, the history of Kayānian Kings as described in the pages of the Shahnama has no counterpart in the records of foreign writers. At only one point does the history of the Kayanians establish contact with the history of the Achœmenians, and that is in the tragic fortunes of the last common representative of the two dynasties, Dara or Darius Codomanus, whom

Alexander overthrew at Issus and Arbela in 330-32 B.C. The destruction of both the Kayānian and the Achœmenian empires is attributed to Alexander son of Philip. Both the dynasties had at their climax conquered vast territories and attained to dizzy heights of power and magnificance. The national memory, rudely interrupted and overwhelmed by the cataclysm of Alexander's invasion, had become confused and got mixed up with earlier traditions of Avestan kings; and this confused medley of history and tradition appears to have been preserved by Firdousi in the glowing accounts of the reigns of Kay Kāus, Kay Khusrav, and Gushtāsp. There may indeed be a threefold confusion between king Gushtāsp of the Kayānian dynasty, Darius Hystaspes of the Greek historians and the Inscriptions, and king Vishtāspa of the Gathas, the contemporary and patron of the prophet of Iran. Firdousi has recorded the traditional history of his country with rare fidelity. Historical research and comparative study of history, as we understand today, were unknown in his time. He had no library and authoritative archieves to fall back upon, although he obviously waded through a mass of floating legends and literature, before he evolved some sort of order and concatenation in the early annals of Iran. Judged by modern standards his chronology, history and geography are patently defective; but we must have due regard to the limitations of the resources and range of knowledge of a poor rustic in a remote corner of mediaeval Iran.

The epic may be roughly divided into two great divisions covering two distinct periods, the legendary or heroic and the historical. The first begins with the beginning and may be said to end with the death of Rustam. The division is in a sense artificial and perhaps more subjective than objective. The annals of Iran are not devoid of great kingly and martial figures and heroic incidents after the passing of Rustam. But there is no question that, with Rustam's disappearance from the stage of Iranian history, Firdousi's ardour cools and his muse assumes a subdued and homely garb. He seems weary and spiritless; and handles even the Alexandrian episode with a hesitant and unconvincing hand. When next he passes on to the history of the Sassanians, no doubt, he takes to it with

renewed vigour, even as Iran itself arose fresh and strong from the ashes of Persipolis. But soon the level drops; and except in isolated passages the latter half of the Shahnama, from the rise of Ardashír to the overthrow of Yezdegird, partakes more of the nature of a chronicle than of heroic poetry. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the opening portion of the poem from the accession of Kayúmarth to the rise of Farídún is also little more than a bare chronicle, lacking both in spirit and incident. The reason probably is that this portion also was of later composition, prepared very likely towards the end of the poet's labours, to round off and complete the whole .

In judging of Firdousi's poetry it is necessary to keep this great division in mind. One half of the Shahnama is poetry and romance; the other history and chronicle. What unites the two—apart from both history and legend being related to the same people—is the unity of form and the quality of Firdousi's verse, which has a distinction of its own, whatever the subject matter and whatever the level it keeps.

The poem in its final form (apart from introductory matter) begins with the reign of Kayumarth, the first ruler of mankind.

It then passes rapidly over the reigns of his three successors Hushang, Tahmuras and Jamshid. These faint, prehistoric figures, really belonging to the dawn of human civilization, have hardly any personality or concrete national role to speak of; and the poet himself is conscious of this. Zahhāk, who overthrew Jamshid, appears more like an allegorical figure embodying the evil principle, an enemy of mankind in general, than a conquerer and oppressor of the Iranian people. The narrative takes definite national shape with Faridun; and with the episode of Iraj and his murderous brothers, Firdousi falls into the regular epic stride, and his verse acquires the strength, vitality and majesty which distinguish it from the entire body of Persian poetry. Whereas upto this point his verse is undistinguished by anything more than its matchless simplicity and fluency, in the description of the assassination of Iraj, and the outraged father's terrible curse, we get a magnificent sample of Firdousi's dramatic and poetic power at its best:

Faridun had divided his kingdom into three parts, of which the best and most prosperous, *viz.* Iran itself, he had given to his youngest son, Iraj. The two elder sons, Salm and Tur, naturally felt hurt at this and harboured a deep grudge against Iraj, who besides, was in every way superior to them in virtue and all kingly qualities. Iraj persuades his father to allow him to visit his brothers and pacify them, if possible. The three brothers meet.

Bidu guft Tūr ar tu az ma kihi,
Chira bar nihādi kulāh-é mihi?
Tura bāyad Irān-u takht-é Kayān,
Mara bar dar-é Turk basta mayān.
Biradar't mihtar zi Khāwar biranj,
Bisar bar tura afsar-u zīr ganj.
Chunin bakhshishi kān jehān-jūy kard
Hama sūya kihtar pisar rūy kard.

"Then spake Tur (who was haughty, fierce and vindictive), 'If you are our inferior in years why do you assume the crown of greatness upon your head? You must have Iran and the imperial Throne, whereas I have to bind my waist among the wild Turks. Your eldest brother toils in distant outlying districts of the West, whereas you wear the imperial crown and sit upon the royal treasures. Surely, in this unjust division our world-conquering father looked only to his youngest son."

Chu az Tūr bishnid Iraj sukhun,
Yaki pāktar pāsukh afkand bun.
Bidu guft kay mihtar-é nām-jūy,
Agar kām-é dil khāhi āram jūy.
Man Iran nakhwāham na Khāwar na Chīn,
Na shāhi na gustarde rūy-é zamīn.
Na tāj-é Kayī khwāham aknun na gāh,
Na nām-é buzurgi na Iran sipāh.
Sipurdum shumā-ra kulāh-u nagīn
Shuma nīz ba man madarīd kīn.
Zamāna nakhwāham biāzar-é tan,
Digar dur manam zi dīdār-é tān.
Juz az kihtari nīst āieen-é man,
Mabād āz-u gardankashi dīn-é man.

"When Iraj heard these words he made a soft and gentle reply. He said 'O aspiring Prince! if you desire heart's ease, seek contentment. I want neither Iran nor Khávar nor Chín; I desire neither kingship nor broad territories. I have had enough of these. I transfer to you the royal crown and seal, and you too bear no malice towards me. I do not wish to see you in distress, and if you wish I shall betake myself away from your sight. I shall practise only humility. I do not believe in ambition and avarice." Tur however was not appeased. He got up in anger and struck Iraj with the heavy golden chair on which he was sitting. Iraj begged for mercy:

Nayāyad-t guft eech tars az Khudāy,
Na sharm az pidar khud hamim ast rāy?
Makush mar mara kat saranjām-e kār,
Bigīrad bikhūn-é manat Kirdigār,
Makun khīshtan-ra zi mardum kushān,
Ki zin pas nabīni khud az man nishān.
Pasandi-u hamdāstāni kuni,
Ki jān dāri-u jān sitani kuni!
Mayāzār mūri ki dāna kash ast,
Ki jān dārad-u jān-é shīrin khush ast.
Pasandeh kunam zin jehān gūshai,
Bigūsha farāz āwuram tūshai.
Jehān khāsti yāfti khun marīz,
Makun ba jehandār-é Yazdān satiz.
Bikhūn-é birādar che bandi kamar,
Che sūzi dil-é pír gushta pidar?

"He said, 'have you no fear of God, no shame of your father? Do not kill me, for in the end God will hold you answerable for my blood. Do not make yourself a murderer; for henceforth you shall not see any trace of me. How could you approve of and agree to this that you possess life and yet seek to deprive another of his life? Do not harm even the humble ant that drags the grain along the ground, for it has a soul and its sweet soul is dear to it. I shall retire into a corner and fend for myself in my retreat. You sought the world, you have got it, do not shed blood. Do not quarrel with the Lord God. How can you bind your waist to shed your brother's blood and grieve the heart of your old father?"

But Tur had his head seething with anger and vain vapours. He made no answer, drew out a dagger from his boot and stabbed Iraj to death. Then the two miscreants cut off his head and having stuffed it with musk and ambergris sent it to the old monarch with this mocking message:— "Lo! here is the precious head to which our ancestral crown reverted. Now give him crown and throne to your heart's content."

In the meanwhile, the aged monarch with all his people and army was anxiously awaiting the return of the young prince. The whole city is gaily decorated and sumptuous preparations are made for his reception, when suddenly the messenger of the murderers arrives with the head of Iraj. Faridun swoons at the ghastly sight, and the whole nation is plunged in the deepest grief. With the head of his beloved innocent son pressed to his heart the old King turned his eyes up to his Maker and cried: "O thou just Lord! look upon this innocent child ruthlessly slain. His helpless head is here before me, his body devoured by the wild beasts of that distant tract. Brand the pitiless hearts of these miscreants with such unbearable anguish that even the beasts of the jungle may feel pity for them! May they henceforth never see a bright day! I only wish and pray that I may be spared until I see one born of the loins of Iraj slay these ruthless murderers in revenge. When I have witnessed this much I should be content to lie down and measure out my grave." Thus the aged monarch cursed, and prayed and mourned his beloved boy night and day. He set fire to his palaces and gardens, shut himself up, lay upon the dust and wept incessantly until he lost his eyes and grass grew with his tears on the ground before him:

Faridun sar-é shāh-é pūr-é jawān
Biyāmad bibar bar gireſté nawān.
Nihādé sar-é Iraj andar kinār,
Sar-é khísh karda sūyé Kirdigār.
Hami guft kay Dāvar-é Dādgar,
Bedin biguneh kushta andar nigar;
Bikhanjar sarash khasta dar pīsh-é man,
Tanash khurde shīrān-é ān anjuman.

Dil-é har du bidād zānsān bisūz,
Ki hargiz nabínand juz tira rūz.
Bi dāgh-é jigar shān kuni āzhadeh
Ki bakhshāyash ārad barīshān dadeh.
Hami khwāham ay roushan-é Kirdigār,
Ki chandān amān yabam az rūzgār,
Ki az tukhm-é Iraj yaki nāmvar,
Bibīnam barin kina busta kamar.
Chu in biguneh ra burīdand sar,
Biburrad sar-é ān du bidādgar.
Chu dīdam chunin zān sipas shāyadam,
Kuja khāk bāla bipaymāyadam.
Biguft īn-u bigrist chandān bizār,
Hami ta giya rustash andar kinār!
Zamin bistar-u khāk bālin-é ouy
Shuda tīra roushan jehān-bin-é ouy
Dar-é bār basta gushāde zabān,
Hami guft zār ay nibardé jawān!
Kas az tājdārān bidin san namurd,
Ki tu murdi ay nāmbardār gurd!
Khurūsh-u fughāni-u chashm-é purāb,
Zi har dām-u dad burda ārām-u khwab.

In Manuchehr's reign we have the great episode of Zāl and Rudābeh, a beautiful and full-blooded love-story culminating in the birth of Rustam. From this point Rustam's mighty figure bestrides the stage of the epic like a Colossus; and the history of Iran is practically the history of his marvellous military exploits. In the narrative of the kings of Kayānian dynasty, from Kay-Qubād to Gushtāsp, Firdousi rises to the full height of epic power; and episode succeeds episode in a dazzling procession, displaying the master's matchless fertility and power of imagination. We have here the great dāstans of Haft-Khwān and the White Demon, Sohrāb, Siāwush, Bezhun, Farūd, and Isfandiyār—with Rustam in the forefront or background of each heroic incident. He is portrayed as the dauntless and redoubtable champion of the Iranian people, the embodiment of knightly prowess and virtues, the soul of chivalry, his country's sure shield and refuge in every crisis, the terror of its foes, and the rock

on which the throne of the Kayānian kings stands stable and secure:

Hamān nāmwar Rustam-é piltan,
Satūn-é Kayān, nāzish-é anjuman!

* * * *

Gushāyanda-é band-é basta tui,
Kayān-ra sipihr-é khujasta tui,
Satūn-e sipāhi-u zibāy-e gāh,
Furūzān bi tu tāj-u takht-u kulāh!

* * * *

Hami khwāndandash khudāwand-é Raksh
Jehāngīr-u shirawzhan-u tāj bakhsh.

"And then the illustrious elephant-bodied Rustam—the prop and pillar of Kayānian Kings, the glory of the nation!"

* * * *

"Thou art the opener of the Gordian knots of our difficulties. Thou art the blessed heaven sheltering and protecting the Kayánians. Thou art the pillar of the army and the ornament of the throne; and the crown and the throne shine by thy light."

* * * *

"He is known as the Master of Rakhsh, the conquerer of the world, the lion-slayer, and King-maker."

There are, of course, other resplendent figures, besides Rustam, flitting across the crowded stage. The wise and staid Gūdarz, his adventurous son Gív, the romantic and dashing Bezhun, the wilful and hot-headed Toos, the saintly Siāwush, the pious and loyal Pirān, and towering above all the ubiquitous and fascinating though sinister, personality of Iran's mortal foe, the Turanian Afrāsiyāb.

Amid the splendours of the imperial courts and the storms of sanguinary battles, Firdousi's women too play their allotted parts, tragic or triumphant, sinister or benign: Rustam's mother Rudabeh, his wife and Sohrāb's mother Tahmina, Kay-Khusrav's mother Firangis, the intrepid Gurdáfrid who fought Sohrāb, Bezhun's beloved Manijeh, and the wily and unclean

Sudābeh, whose unholy passion sent Siāwush into exile and kindled a conflagration scarcely quenched by multitudinous seas of blood.

In this chapter of her history Iran is young and feeling its might like a youthful giant awakened from a refreshing sleep, achieving success and world-wide dominion, by the might of its chivalry and the wisdom of its policy. Firdousi here employs with consummate skill and effect all the elements of epic drama, mighty warriors, kings and potentates, resplendant princesses, damsels in distress, arms and armours, lion, leopard, wolf, dragon, fairies, demons, sorcerers, enchanted castles, single combats, titanic conflicts, tempests, love hatred, anguish, laughter, tears, death—all the pomp, pageantry, revelry and high debate of camp, court and council :

Zi abyāt-á gharra dur rih si hazār,
Marān jumla dar shíva-é kārzār,
Zi shamshīr-u tír-u kamān-u kamand,
Zi gupāl-u az tīghhaé buland.
Zi bargastawān-u zi khaftān-u khūd,
Zi sahara-u darya-u az khushk-u rūd.
Zi gurg-u zi shīr-u zi pil-u pilang,
Zi afrīt-u az azhdaha-u nihang
Zi nayrang-é ghoul-u zi jādu-é dīv,
Kizishān bigardun rasida gharīv.
Zi mardān-é nāmi birūz-é masāf,
Zi gurdān-é jangi gah-é razm-u lāf.
Hamān nāmdārān-é bājāh-u āb,
Chu Tūr-u chu Salm-u chu Afrāsiyāb.
Chu shah Āfarīdun-u chun Kay Qubad,
Chu Zahhāk-é badkish-u bidīn-u dād,
Chu Garshāsp-u Sām-u Narimān-é gurd,
Jehān pahalwānān-é ba dastburd,
Chu Hūshang-u Tahmūras-é divband,
Manuchihr-u Jamshīd shāh-é buland.
Chu Kāus-u Kay Khusrav-é tājwar,
Chu Rustam chu Ruintan-é nāmwar.
Chu Gūdarz hushtād pūr-é guzīn,
Sawārān-é maidān-u shiran-e kin.

The true epic level of high emotion and heroic achievement is maintained throughout, until the inevitable decline of the Kayānian dynasty with the reign of Bahman. The decline of the empire is, as it were, reflected in the poem; and Firdousi's treatment of even so celebrated an episode as Alexander's conquest is quite languid and uninspiring, notwithstanding the pleasant fiction of making out Alexander to be an Iranian prince by birth. After Alexander there is a tragic gap in the national history for over 500 years. The nation and the empire are broken up into small fragments and principalities and the national history is a blank. Firdousi dismisses the five centuries of Parthian rule in a score of verses, declaring that of these princes he knew nothing except mere names :—

Chu kutāh shud shākh-u ham bīkh-é shān,
Nagūyad jehān-dida tārikh-é shān.
Azīshān juz az nām nashnida-am
Na dar nāma-é Khusrawān dida-am.

"Since they have been cut off and obliterated, root and branch, the ancient chronicler does not narrate their history. Of them I have not heard anything except mere names; nor have I read their account in the Book of Kings."

With the accession of Ardashīr, the founder of the Sassanian empire, we enter upon the latter half of the great epic. It covers the period from 226 A.D. to about 650 A.D., when the Parsi empire collapsed before the overwhelming hordes of the Arabs. The kings and soldiers of this period are mostly historical. For the greater part the poet also follows his sources with rare fidelity;* and Sassanian history as narrated in the pages of the Shahnama, although not lacking in warlike and regal figures and romantic incidents, consists more of chronicle and anecdote than of heroic episodes. The narrative is regularly punctuated by autobiographical passages; and in all probability this latter portion of the

* How absolutely faithful Firdousi is to his sources has been shown by several writers, pointing out parallel passages from the Shahnama and Pahlavi originals, like Karnamak of Ardashir and the Book of Zarir.

Shahnama, from Ardashir to Yezdegrid, was composed after Firdousi was definitely assured of royal support and patronage, if not actually at the instance of Sultan Mahmūd. The poet proceeds systematically from reign to reign, and there are few great dāstāns or episodes interrupting the course of the chronicle. There is no action at all in many of the reigns. They open with a speech from the throne, of no particular significance, and end with rather tame and monotonus reflections upon the instability of human affairs. Descriptions of battles and conquests also suffer from repetition of incident and imagery. Long passages consisting of moral and philosophical disquisitions are indescribably tedious; and the poem in large portions lacks the energy and movement of a true epic. Many of the moral and political harangues in the reigns of Noushirwān and Khusrav Parvīz are obviously close translations of Pahlavi tracts, entirely lacking the lucidity and brilliance of Firdousi's own independent reflections. The contrast is clear and striking when, after vainly beating his luminous wings in the toils of turbid texts, the master breaks through the trammels of his sources and soars once again into the clear empyrean of his own pure and magnificent music. By way of illustration a passage from the interminable *bazms* of Buzarjamihr may be read side by side with anyone containing his own independent moralising. In the former although the hand is the hand of Firdousi, the voice is the voice of some obscure muddle-headed priestly scribe:

In this manner somewhat haltingly the great history moves onwards to its inevitable close. But long before he reaches the end the poet is conscious of the impending abyss in which the glorious history of the Sassanian empire is soon to be swallowed up. And on the accession of Yezdegird, the last of the royal line of Sassan, Firdousi laments the downfall of his beloved country in unforgettable strains. To him, as to the ill-starred general of the Iranian army, Rustam Farrukhzād, Qādasiya sounded the knell and spelt the doom of all that was good, great and magnificent in human history. Truth, goodness, light, heroic achievement and royal glory were disappearing; the old order was changing and yielding place to a new one rooted in disorder and discord, treachery and unfaith:

Tabah gardad in ranjha-é darāz,
Shawad nasaza shah-é gardan faraz.
Na takht-u na tāj-u na zarrina kafsh,
Na gouhar, na afsar, na barsar dirafsh.
Biranjad yaki dīgari bar khurad,
Bidād-u bibakhshish kasi nangirad.
Shab āyad yaki chashm rakhshān kunad,
Nihufta kasi-ra khurūshān kunad.
Zi paymān bigardand-u az rasti,
Girāmi shawad kazzhi-u kāsti.
Payāda shawad mardum-é jangjūy,
Sawār ānki lāf ārad-u guftagūy.
Kishāwarz-é jangi shawad bihunar,
Nizhād-u buzurgi nayāyad bibar.
Rubāyad hami īn azān ān azīn
Zi nafrin nadānand bāz āfrin.
Nihāni batar z'āshkāra shawad
Dil-é mardumān sang-é khāra shawad.
Badandīsh gardad pisar bar pidar,
Pidar hamchunān bar pisar chāragar.
Shawad banda-é bihunar Shahryār,
Nizhād-u buzurgi nayāyad bikār.
Bigīti kasi-ra namānad wafa,
Rawān-u zabānha shawad pur jafa.
Az Iran-u az Turk-u az Taziyan,
Nizhādi padīd āyad andar mayān,
Na dihqān na Turk-u na Tāzi buvad;
Sukhunha bikirdār-é bāzi buvad;
Hama ganjha zīré dāman nihand,
Bimīrand-u kūshish bidushman dihand.
Chunān fāsh gardad gham-u ranj-u shūr,
Ki rāmish bihangām-é Bahram Gūr.
Na jashn-u na rāmish na kūshish na kām,
Hama chāra-u tambul-u sāz-u dām.
Ziyān-é kasān az pay-é sūd-e khīsh,

Bijūyand-u dīn andar ārand pīsh.
Nabāshad bahār az zimistān padíd
Nayārand hangām-é rāmish nabīd.

"These long labours will be wasted; the unworthy shall become exalted rulers of mankind. There will be no throne or diadem, no gold shoes, no jewels, crowns or waving banners. The toil of one will be devoured by another, and no one will have any regard for justice and charity. At nightfall the assassin will give the secret stab which would make his victim shriek in pain and terror.

"Men will turn away from truth and their plighted word; crookedness and deceit will be held dear. The truly warlike will toil on foot; he who talks and brags will strut about on stately steeds. The sturdy yeoman will lose his craft; birth and breeding will bear no fruit. People will rob one another and they will not know blessings from curses. Hidden things will be worse than what is open. Men's hearts will harden like the granite. The son will wish evil to his own father, and the father similarly plot against his son. A worthless slave will become the monarch of the world; nobility and gentle birth will be of no avail. There will be no faith on earth; men's hearts and tongues will be full of venom. From the Iranians, and Turks and Arabs a mongrel race will come into being which will be neither pure Iranian nor Turk nor Arab. Men's words will be light and worthless like idle sport. People will secrete their wealth and die leaving it to be the spoil of their enemies. Woe and want and tribulation will be as rife in the world as joy and happiness were in the time of Bahram Gur. There will be no festivals, no enjoyment, no healthy exercises, no heart's ease. It will be all trickery and fraud, traps and snares. Men will compass injury to others for their own advantage, and put forward the excuse of religion. The bright spring will not be distinguishable from the dark winter, and good wine will not be forthcoming even at the time of feasting and merry-making."

The great poem ends upon this tragic note. There is no gleam of hope to relieve the gathering gloom. The star of Iran has set. Rustam Farrukhzād forecasts defeat and

disaster for the nation and empire; and the poet calls up no prophetic vision promising a restoration of his country's imperial fortunes. On the contrary, he sees his native land lie torn and bleeding under the heels of a succesSon of low adventurers:*

Then come the graceful closing lines in which he gives the date of completing the mighty work—incidentally the same fateful day and month which witnessed the fatal accession of Yezdegird III upon the throne of the Sassanians:—

Sarāmad kanun qissa-é Yezdegird,
Bimāh-é Sapandārmad rūzé Ard.
(Chu bugzasht ou shāh shud Yezdegard,
Bimāh-é Sapandārmad rūz-é Ard.)

* * * *

Barin nāma bar umraha bugzirad,
Bilchwānad harān kas ki dārad khirad.
Banāhā-é ābad gardad kharab,
Zi bārān-u az tābish-é āftāb.
Pay afgandam az nadhm kākhi bulnad.
Ki az bād-u bārān nayābad gazand!
Harān kas ki dārad hūsh-u rāy-u dīn,
Pas az marg bar man kunad āfrin.
Na mīram azin pas ki man zinda-am
Ki tukhm-é sukhun-ra parāganda-am.

"Ages will roll by over this history, and whoever has sense and wisdom will read it. The strong and stately mansions of today by sun and rain will crumble to decay. But neither rain nor storm shall ever destroy this palace of my poetry. Whoever has wit, and faith and judgment will shower benedictions upon me after I am gone. But I shall not die; henceforth I am alive for ever, since I have scattered far and wide the seeds of speech."

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* Compare Anvari's famous elegy on Sultan Sanjar after that monarch was overwhelmed and captured by the tribes of Guzz:

Bar buzurgan-e zamana shuda khurdan salar,
Bar kariman-e jehan gashta lai'man mihtar.
Shad illa bidar-e marg nayabi mardum,
Bikr juz dar shikam-e madar nayabi dukhtar.

And also Hafiz's Ode beginning:

In che shurist ki dar dour-e gamar mibinam,
Hama afaq pur az fitna-u shar mibinam.
Dukhtaran-ra hama jang ast-u jidil ba madar,
Pisaram ra hama badkhwah-e pidar mibinam.
Hich rahmi na biradar bi biradar darad,
Hich shaf'qat na pidarra bi pisar mi binam.

Chapter XVI

CHARACTERS.

The Shahnama in a sense is not a true epic. It lacks unity, a single central action and final catastrophe, to which all the other incidents and episodes are subservient and towards which the entire movement of the poem is directed. Even putting aside the latter half which is essentially a versified chronicle of the nation's history, the epic portion consists of a series of great episodes without unity of action or a single central figure whose exploits form the theme of the poem. Rustam, no doubt, largely fills such a role, and overshadows the action of the epic for a considerable space. But other national figures of epic stature stalk across the stage before and alongside of Rustam. The first of such national heroes is Farídun.

KINGS.

Faridun.

Faridun is represented as the chosen instrument of God for the deliverance of the Iranian people from a foreign tyrant, the heroic king who is the source and fountain-head of royal prowess and glory:

Hamīdun buru ta Faridun-e Shah
Ki asl-é Kayān būd-u zibāy-é gāh.

"Thus hark back to King Faridun, the root of royalty and the ornament of the throne."

He is the pre-destined destroyer of the unrighteous oppressor of Iran, the antagonist of God and man, the monster Zahhák. The struggle between them is not merely a war between two chieftains for power, but is meant to typify the eternal conflict between the principles of good and evil:

Hamāna ki bāshad birū'zé shumār
Faridun-u Zahhāk-ra kārzār.

"Verily the Day of Doom shall see another struggle between Faridun and Zahhāk." Faridun is the traditional founder of the long line of Iranian kings which went on for thousands

of years until extinguished in the seventh century of the Christian era. With him also first blazed forth like a star the banner of Iran, under whose light Iran achieved a thousand victories and subjugated the world:

Ki andar shab-é tira khurshīd bud,
Jehān ra azu bīm-u ummid bud.

"Which blazed like the Sun in the depth of the night, and the hopes and fears of the world centred upon it."

Faridun's historical existence is well authenticated by the Avesta scriptures; and the revolt of Káwah or Gáwah, the blacksmith, of Isfahan—"stout old Gow," as Carlyle calls him—and the creation of the Kāwiani banner from the leather apron of the blacksmith, is, according to Malcolm, the first undoubted historical fact which emerges from the myriad fables of this dim dawn of the annals of Iran. Faridun is Firdousi's hero as king; and for the Iranian, has remained for all these centuries of time the typical monarch, wise, just and powerful:

Faridun-é farrukh ferishta nabūd,
Zi mushk-u zi amber serishta nabūd.
Bidād-u dihish yāft ān nikūi
Tu dād-u dihish kun Faridun tūi.
Faridun zi kāri ki kard Izadi,
Nakhust in jehān-ra bishust az badi;
Yaki bīshtar band-é Zahhāk bud,
Ki napārsa būd-u nāpāk bud.

"The blessed Faridun was not an angel; nor was he constituted of musk and ambergris. He achieved all this renown by his justice and liberality. Do thou practise justice and liberality, and thou too wilt be a Faridun! The first divine labour of Faridun was to wash this world clean of all evil; the next was the chaining of the impious and accursed demon Zahhák."

But as portrayed by Firdousi, Faridun is not merely a type of kingly virtues, but an intensely human and vital figure. It is characteristic of Firdousi that, while, on the one hand, he invests Faridun with a halo of superhuman virtues and

heroic endeavour, he illustrates his frailty as mere man in his tragic partiality for his youngest son, his unbearable anguish, and the terrible imprecation which he invokes upon the murderers of his beloved son. With the assassination of Iraj at the hands of his unnatural brothers, Tur and Salm, began that unending and inveterate blood feud between Iran and Turan, which is the main motive and action of the Shahnama for a thousand years.

KAY KAUS.

The next kingly figure occupying an important space in the epic is Kay Kaus. He is the least conventional and most individualistic in Firdousi's portrait-gallery of kings. He is depicted as foolish, wilful, impetuous, hotheaded, credulous and vindictive.

"I have not seen anybody among the high and the low in the world so self-willed as Kāus. He has neither wisdom, nor faith nor judgment, and neither his mind nor his heart is stable. You might say he has no brain in his head; not a single idea of his is good. He is devoid of sense and judgment like a mad man, and is moved about from his station by every breeze that blows. The head of Kay Kāus is like a fierce fire-altar, and his speech as well as campaigning is absurd."

His folly and impetuosity betray him into situations both perilous and ridiculous. He is credited with having planned an invasion of the heavens; and the song of a dancer lures him into a disastrous campaign in Mazenderan. He exiles a saintly son on account of the calumny of a wily woman; and he administers in full court an undeserved insult to Rustam at a critical juncture, provoking the latter's righteous wrath. When Sohrab lies mortally wounded Kay Kāus with mean vindictiveness recalls the young warrior's boyish vaunts, and refuses to give the cordial (Nūsh-dāru) which might have saved the young hero's life. But he is not devoid of courage and enterprise.

KAY KHUSRAV.

Kay Kāus is succeeded by his grand-son Kay Khusrav, Firdousi's paragon of kingly virtues and dignity. Uniting in

his veins the irreconcilable bloods of Kay Qubad and of Afrāsiyāb, he is like, Faridun, predestined and dedicated to a divine purpose. Royal glory (Farri-Kayān) the heritage of the Kayānian dynasty, shines upon him with unabated lustre; and having accomplished his earthly mission he vanishes from the stage of life as a demi-god. He does not die; but like, Arthur and Yūdhishthir, he passes into other and higher regions of endeavour or repose. He enjoys the unbounded and unquestioning loyalty and devotion of his people; and is portrayed as the most perfect exponent of kingly qualities, wisdom, statesmanship, justice, dignity and piety. Under him Iran is represented as attaining to unparalleled and unprecedented heights of power, magnificence and renown; and in the legends of the East his is a name resplendent and untarnished.

GUSHTĀSP

After Kai Khusrav comes Gushtāsp, who again, like his predecessor Kai Kāus, is a mixed character. It is not clear what particular tradition or authority Firdousi followed in the development of Gushtāsp's character and career. He appears to be made up of a mixture of more than one historical or traditional personalities. Like certain other Avestic characters Gushtāsp has been degraded in the pages of the poem; but he has been made vivid and human in the process of degradation. His youth is described as one of pure adventure and high-souled exploits. Like Siáwush, Prince Gushtāsp goes into exile, a fugitive from his father's court. His position and parentage are unknown, and he lives in obscurity in Rum apprenticed to a blacksmith. But his magnificent physique and the might of his arm soon make him the talk of the town. He is given a hammer and asked to mould a red-hot ingot of iron; and this is the result:—

Bi Gushtāsp dādand putk-é giran,
Baru anjuman gashta āhangarān.
Bizad putk-u bish'kast sandān-u gūy
Azu gasht bāzār pur guftagūy.
Bitarsīd Burāb-u guft ay jawān,
Bi zakhm-é tu sandān nadārad tawān!

"They gave a hammer to Gushtāsp and the blacksmiths gathered round him to watch. With one blow of his hammer he shattered both ingot and anvil, and the whole market place was filled with the clamour of astonishment. Then Burab (the blacksmith) said 'Oh young man, the anvil cannot stand the power of thy stroke'."

He accomplishes incognito some marvellous feats of arms, and Katāyūn, the daughter of the King of Rūm falls in love with him in spite of his apparently low station and obscure lineage. He helps Āhren and Mīrīn, two princes who were suitors for the hands of the other two daughtes of the King, by slaying in their behalf a terrible wolf and a dragon which ravaged the land. The magnitude of the exploits soon reveals that a far mightier arm than that of either Āhren or of Mīrīn is responsible for these doughty deeds. Katāyūn, with the unerring instinct of true love, recognises the high blood and indomitable spirit behind the humble exterior, and bestows her hand upon the disguised prince in a gathering of suitors, which included the aristocracy of the land and its neighbourhood.

But Gushtāsp's unholy and inordinate greed for power, shown both in the indecent haste with which he wrests the sceptre from the feeble grasp of an aged father, and the remorseless cunning with which he keeps it out of the hands of a worthy and aspiring son, constitutes an indelible blot upon his name.

With the death of Gushtāsp the power and the glory of the Kayanian dynasty decline; and his successors are poor both in character and achievement. Alexander who extinguishes this empire is in a forced and artificial way smuggled into the Iranian royal line. But the poet's attempt is half-hearted and unconvincing, and Alexander remains an alien and an enemy of the power and glory of ancient Iran.

AFRĀSIYĀB

But perhaps the mightiest and most impressive in this portrait-gallery of kings is the colossal figure of Afrāsiyāb. He is the hereditary and relentless foe of Iran; and for seven long reigns his name is a terror in the camp and court of the

Kayānians. Supreme both as king and soldier, consummate both in statecraft and strategy, his energy, resource, and determined pursuit of his purpose compel our admiration and respect, in spite of the malignity of his nature and the unrighteousness of his cause. The hero of a hundred battle-fields, foiled, frustrated and persecuted time and again, he acknowledges no defeat, and refuses to yield till the last, until the vendetta provoked by the execution of Siāwush is quenched in his own blood. Firdousi has no doubt denounced his name and memory as the arch-enemy of Iran. But the picture is not devoid of grandeur or elevating and even sympathetic touches; and he emerges from the hand of the master a grand and majestic personality, like Milton's Satan:

Shawad kūh-é āhan chu darya-é āb
Agar bishnawad nām-é Afrāsiyāb!

* * * * *

Ki shīrān-é Iran bidarya-é āb,
Nashusti tanaz bīm-é Afrāsiyāb!

"A mountain of iron would melt and become liquid like the sea should it hear even the name of Afrāsiyāb."

* * * *

"Such was the terror of his name that even the lions and tigers of Iran were afraid to wash their bodies in its rivers."

SIĀWUSH

One of Firdousi's great tragic figures is Prince Siāwush, the son of Kay Kāus and the father of Kay Khusrav. He is a veritable Adonis, endowed with extraordinary physical beauty and charm, so much so that whoever looks at him falls in love with him:

Bigūi mara ta murād-é tu chist,
Ki bar chihr-é to farr-é chihr-e parist.
Harān kas ki az dūr bīnad tura,
Shawad bīhush-u bar guzīnad tura.
Nabāshad shigift ar shawad māh khwār,
Tu Khurshīd dāri khud andar kinār!

* * * * *

Kay-é nāmwar guft kinsān buwad, ...
Kasi ku aba farre-é Yazdān buwad!

"Tell me, what is thy desire? For thy face blazes with the beauty of a fairy. Whoever beholds thee even from a distance swoons before thy dazzling splendour and comes to love thee. It would not be strange if the moon is despised in thy presence; for thou hast the sun himself under thy arm."

* * * * * *

"Ah such," said the monarch (Afrāsiyāb), "such indeed are those upon whom the glory of the Lord doth shine."

His step-mother Sudābeh falls desperately in love with him and employs every womanly artifice to gain her purpose. But Siāwush, like Joseph, combines purity of soul with beauty of body. He firmly resists and repels the advances of Sudābeh. When she declares her love and kisses him, his cheeks glow with shame, he bursts into tears, and seeks refuge with God:

As in the parallel legend of Yusaf and Zuleikha,* the woman foiled of her foul purpose falsely accuses Siāwush of attempting to outrage her modesty, and Siāwush ultimately establishes his innocence by successfully going through the ordeal of fire:

Sudabeh is condemned to death as a perjurer but Siāwush nobly intercedes in her behalf and procures a pardon.

Ultimately Siāwush leaves his father's court and goes into exile. He seeks refuge in Turān, where Afrāsiyāb receives him kindly and gives him his daughter Firangis in marriage. All goes on well for a time, but ultimately Siāwush falls a victim to the intrigues and jealousies of an alien court, and Afrāsiyāb is led to perpetrate the fatal atrocity of putting the prince to death.

WARRIORS

The warriors whose exploits glow in the pages of the Shahnama are a legion. But a few outstanding names may be referred to. Confining ourselves to the epic portion, the chivalry of Iran is in the main gathered round what has, not inaptly, been called the Round Table of King Kay Khusrav.

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* There is an exact and striking parallel to the story of Siawush also in the legend of Puran Bhakat in Hindu Mythology.

The central figure of this brilliant throng is Rustam. After him come Gūdarz and Gīv, Bezhun, Toos and other lesser luminaries. Two other great champions fall outside the pale of this Round Table, Sohrāb and Isfandiyār. Zāl throughout has been represented more as a wise counsellor than as a fighter. Firdousi's warriors compare favourably with Homer's. They are most of them true knights. "Homer," says R. M. Binning in his 'Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia' (Allen, 1857), "degrades his gods to something far beneath the level of his men, who are truculent ruffiians at best. Firdousi's heroes are much more like gentlemen, and his demons and genii behave as such characters ought to."

RUSTAM

Rustam's position is supreme and unchallenged in the chivalry of ancient Iran. Firdousi has not only made him a great warrior, matchless in strength and courage, but has endowed him with all noble and knightly qualities. He is pictured as invincible, the only champion who ever threw him being his own son Sohráb. His faith in God, his piety and clean life, his loyalty to the land and throne of Iran, are as remarkable as his physical strength and courage. Rustam is typical of the robust vigour, hardihood, love of adventure and joyous living, unswerving loyalty and simpleminded faith, of the true soldier. Firdousi has conceived him upon a magnificent scale, worthy of one meant to embody the might and chivalry of the greatest age of a great people. He casts his lofty and luminous shadow even before his coming. Thus the Sīmurgh proclaims his proud advent into the great house of Sām, just before his birth:—

Azin sarv-é simin bar-é māhrūy,
Yaki shīr bāshad tura nāmjūy
Ki khāk-é pay-é ou bibūsad hazhabr,
Nayārad bisarbar guzashtansh abr
Az āwāz-é ou charm-é jangi pilang.
Shawad chāk chāk-u bikhāyad du chang,
Bigāh-é khirad Sām-é sangi buwad,
Bikhashm andarun shīr-é jangi buwad. ... .

"By this moon-faced silver bodied cypress (Rudābeh) thou shalt have a renowned lion, the dust of whose feet the tiger

will kiss, and over whose exalted head even the clouds shall not venture to pass; the terror of whose voice will cause the leopard's skin to split and make him bite his paws. In counsel he will be as weighty as Sam; in battle a veritable tiger."

His size is so great that his birth is attended with utmost difficulty, and Rudābeh is safely delivered of this mighty baby only after a Caesarian operation. She faints away through the pains of labour, and Zāl in his distress seeks help from the Sīmurgh. That wise bird gives them hope and guidance; and under his directions the operation is performed and the heroic child safely delivered. Then comes the description of the baby:—

Hama mūy-é sar surkh-u chihra chu khūn;
Chu Khurshīd-é rakhshande āmad burūn;
Du dastash pur az khun zi mādar bizād
Nadārad kasi in chunin batcha yād.
Biyak rūz gufti ki yak sālé būd,
Yaki tūda-é susan-u lāle būd.
Bikhandid azān bachcha sarvé-suhi,
Bidid andaru farr-é shahinshahi,
Bigufta birustam gham āmad bisar,
Nihadand Rustamsh nāmé pisar.

"All the hair of his head was red, and blood-red his face. He came out like the refulgent sun of the dawn. He was born with both his hands full of blood. Nobody ever saw such a baby. In one day he grew as big as a year-old child: and he looked like a bunch of lilies and tulips. The mother smiled to see such a mighty child with the glory of royalty shining on his face. She cried "I am now free *(rustam)* and my suffering has ended;" and so they named the baby Rustam.

This pre-natal promise is amply fulfilled; and from his early boyhood Rustam enters upon a career of adventure and mighty exploits, which makes his name the glory of Iran and the terror of its foes: It is the fond and fluent lips of Tahmina which express the popular estimate of his prowess in these memorable lines:—

Birahna chu tīgh-é tu bīnad uqāb,
Nayārad binakhchīr kardan shitāb.

Nishān-é kamān-é tu dārad huzhabr,
Zi bīm-é sinān-é tu khun bārad abr.

"Should the eagle behold thy naked blade he would pause before pouncing upon his prey; the tiger bears the marks of thy archery; the cloud sheds bloody tears in fear of thy spear."

Rustam's exploits are the warp and the woof, the flower and the crown of the epic. Firdousi's hand has never faltered for a single moment in his delineation of the character and career of his hero; and a hundred doughty adventures, a thousand inspiring touches, have enhanced the stature and ennobled the personality of this, the most illustrous name in the annals of Eastern chivalry:

"The songs they sing of Rustam
Fill all the world with light;
If truth be in their music,
He was a noble knight."

As a mere child of seven he steps boldly forward to arrest the career of a rogue elephant, when all around him are running helter-skelter, to escape that moving avalance of mortal mischief:

Nigeh kard kūhi khurūshanda dīd,
Zamin zīr-é ou dīg-é jūshanda dīd.

"He looked and saw a raging mountain under whom the agitated earth was like a boiling cauldron."

In early youth he bursts light-heartedly into the hunting park of Afrasiyab, with seven companions, to indulge in a dangerous frolic, in a spirit of pure fun and adventure:

Darin dasht-é Turān shikāri kunīm,
Ki andar jehān yādgāri kunīm.

His plucking off the two ears of the keeper of Avlād for disturbing his sleep; his disdaining to kill the terrible White Demon while he is asleep until he is roused and forced to fight; his thunderous defiance of King Kay Kaūs,—reminiscent of the wrath of Achilles,—when the latter foolishly reprimands him:

Chu khashm āwuram shah Kaus kist,
Chera dast yāzad biman Tūs kist?
Mara rūz-é firūzi az Dāvar ast,
Na az pādsha-u na az lashkar ast.

"When I am angry who is King Kay Kāus? Who is Toos that he should dare to lay hands upon me? I owe my power and victory to the Lord God, and not to Kings or armies."—his marching forward alone on foot to meet so formidable an opponent as Ashkabūs with bow and a single arrow;—are all incidents illustrative of matchless strength, courage and chivalry.

Even in the evening of his life his loyal and lofty spirit remains unimpaired. Thus, Bahman, seeing Rustam seated with his brother Zavāreh at the foot of a hill, and being struck with dread at his mighty physique,—

Yaki mard hamchu kuh-é bisatūn,
Derakhti girefta bichung andarūn,
Chunin guft Bahman ki in Rustam ast
Waya āftāb-é sapidadam ast!

"Bahman seeing a man like Mount Behistun, holding a tree in his hand, exclaimed, "Is this Rustam or is it the glorious sun of the refulgent dawn?"—hurls a huge stone to crush Rustam to death. Zavareh sees it crashing down and warns Rustam. The latter refuses to stir, continues his meal, and when the rock descends upon him with a mighty crash, just kicks it away like a football!

Next, in his combat with Prince Isfandiyár—the most trying of his combats both from the physical and the moral stand-point—we see a noble struggle raging in his breast between his sense of personal honour and his loyalty to his sovereign. It is characteristic of Firdousi that he does not permit the latter feeling to predominate, as an inferior artist, under the influence of religious or royalist zeal, might well have done. To the simple-minded soldier his personal honour is everything. He would never allow his hands to be tied even at the royal command. Rustam rises to the full height of his heroic stature when, after humble and unavailing pro-

testation of devotion and service, he hurls his defiance at the misguided Prince in a mighty verse:

Ki guftat buru dast-é Rustam biband,
Nabandad mara dast charkh-é buland!

"Who bid thee go and bind the hands of Rustam? These almighty heavens themselves cannot bind my hands!"

Lastly, not long after this tragic combat, in which he could save his honour only at the cost of all that he held dear and even sacred, when death comes to him in a dastardly manner through the treachery of his own half-brother, he takes his departure, with his heroic horse, Rakhsh, not indeed in a blaze of glory, but with quiet dignity and resignation, having shot his last bolt to avenge himself:—

Darakht-u birādar bihambar bidūkht
Bihangām-é raftan dilash bar furūkht.

"He transfixed with the arrow both the tree and the traitor; and in the moment of passing his heart kindled with pride."*

SOHRĀB

There is nothing in the whole range of human history and literature to compare with the career of Sohrāb. He lived one crowded hour of glorious life, shot like a brilliant meteor leaving a blazing trail, to be immediately swallowed up in everlasting darkness:

Chu barq āmadam raftam aknun chu bād.

"I came like a flash of lightning and now I pass away like a whirlwind."

Sohrāb is par excellence the youthful warrior, endowed with matchless strength, knowing no fear, without guile or suspicion, self-confident, rushing irresistibly to his doom, taking no count of adverse forces. He is a born fighter and is pictured as marvellously precocious:

Chu yak māh shud hamchu yak sāl bud,
Barash chun bar-é Rustam-e Zāl bud;

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* Sigurd, in the German Niebelungen legends, similarly, with his last effort hurls his sword at his murderer, and kills him.

Chu seh sālé shud sāz-é maidan gireft,
Bipanjum dil-é shīr mardān gireft.
Chu dih saleh shud zān zamin kas nabūd,
Ki yārust bā-ou nibard āzmūd.
Bi nakhchir-é shīrān burun tākhti,
Bibāzi hama razm-é shān sākhti
Bitag dar dawīdi pay-é bādpāy,
Girefti dum-u asp māndi bijāy!

"When he was only a month old he was like a child a year old, and his body was like that of Rustam. At three he donned the armour of battle, and at five awed the hearts of experienced fighters. At ten there was not a single man in the whole country who could stand battle with him. To him the hunt of lions was like child's play. He would run after a galloping steed, hold him by his tail, and the steed would stop dead on the spot."

When he learns of his lofty lineage from his mother, boy as he is, he disregards her warning, throws all caution to the winds, and proclaims his birth to his father's enemies. In his boyish eyes no power on earth could withstand a combination of Rustam and Sohrab:

Chunin guft Sohrāb k'andar jehān,
Nadārad kasi in sukhun-ra nihān.
Kanun man zi Turkān-é jangāwaran,
Farāz āwuram lashkari bikirām.
Bikhwāham shudan sūy-e Iran Zamin,
Bibīnam mar'ān bāb-é ba-āfrin.
Bi Rustam diham ganj-u takht-u kulāh,
Nihshānam'sh bar gāh-é Kāus shah.
Tura Bānu-é shihr-é Irān kunam,
Bijang andarun kār-é shīran kunam!
Chu Rustam pidar bāshad-u man pisar,
Bigiti namānad yaki tājwar.
Chu roushan buvad rūy-é Khurshid-u māh,
Sitāra chira bar farāzad kulāh?

"Then answered Sohrab bold 'none would keep such a glorious fact concealed from the world. Now I shall go and collect a mighty army of Turkish fighters, march upon Iran,

and see the blessed face of my noble father. I shall bestow the throne, crown and treasures upon Rustam, and place him upon the seat of King Kay Kaús. I shall make thee Queen of Iran, and perform the feats of lions in battle. With Rustam and myself as father and son, there shall not remain a single crowned head upon the face of the earth. When the sun and the moon shine in their glory, why should the lesser stars display their crown?' "

Sohrab with characteristic impetuosity throws in his lot with his father's mortal enemy, Afrāsiyāb, and marches upon Iran with a huge army of Turks placed purposely at his disposal by the wily Turanian. He is too young to realise that he is made a mere tool in the deep game of Afrāsiyāb, any more than that he is only a pawn for the sport of Fate. A malignant Fate indeed dogs his footsteps at every stage. He is surrounded by counsellors whose policy it is to prevent him from recognising his father. Hajīr, the Iranian Keeper of the Marches, in a spirit of natural suspicion, misleads him about Rustam's identity. Zinda-Razm, his uncle, whom Tahmina had specially sent to introduce him to his father, is unwittingly killed by Rustam. Rustam himself prevaricates when adjured to reveal his identity. And so this trustful boy meets his father only in a last bloody embrace, and knows him for what he is only when it is too late. Fate takes its relentless course as in the Greek tragedies; and the drama moves forward resistlessly to its unnatural but predestined catastrophe. There is nobody to blame. When father and son meet in the final combat "A malignant fate hovers over their heads:"

Bisar bar hami gasht badkhwāh bakht.

Sohrab remains to the last "the marvellous boy," who perished in his passion for martial glory, a pathetic and winsome figure, beating vainly his mighty arms against the toils of Destiny:

Sipahdār Sohrāb ān rūz dast,
Tu gufti ki charkh-é bulandash bibast.

"You might have thought that on that fatal day the high heavens had tied down the hands of the champion Sohrab."

ISFANDIYAR

Isfandiyar is another magnificent and tragic figure. His adventures and exploits are comparable to those of Rustam. He defeats and overthrows the enemies of his father and his faith, and like Rustam successfully goes through the dangers and labours of the Haft-Khwān. Gushtāsp has imprisoned him; and subsequently when the king offers to release him, Isfandiyar retires within himself and, like Achilles in his wrath, refuses to fight for his country at its sorest need. Nothing shakes him from his sullen purpose, and the dire straits to which his country, king, father, grandfather, brothers and sisters are reduced have no effect upon him. Like Achilles again, it is only when he is told that his favourite brother, Farshidvard, has been killed by the Turanians, that his spirit is roused, he bursts his bonds and at one bound prepares to avenge the death of Farshidvard:

"When he heard of Farshidvard his face blazed with anger and his heart ached with anguish; and he exclaimed, 'Alas and alas, thou mighty warrior! lion-hearted chief and prince! With thy wounds I feel myself wounded, and my cheeks are stained with my heart's blood.' "

He then sends for blacksmiths and orders them to break open his chains and fetters. But while they are toiling at their job with hammer and file, he grows impatient at the delay, jumps up, pushes the blacksmiths aside, and by his own exertions at one bound bursts his bonds and fetters.

"The heart of the fettered Prince grew impatient at this tardiness. He addressed the blacksmith, "O you clumsy-handed, accursed craftsman! You know how to forge bonds, but not how to break them open.' He wrenched away his hands from the blacksmith, stood up on his feet, grappled straight with his bonds, pressed his feet and strained his hands and at one bound broke open the bonds and bolts and chains."

The tragic climax of Isfandiyar's brilliant career is his titanic combat with Rustam, deliberately planned by the old king to balk a deserving son of his promised reward. The conflict between Rustam and Isfandiyar, to which each is

reluctantly driven, is indeed the dark tragedy of Kayanian history, and marks the beginning of the end of that splendid dynasty and empire. Both the heroes are, as it were, placed on the horns of a dilemma. Both see the fatal futility of the struggle. Both realise that defeat means death; but victory is empty and valueless. But the personal honour of each champion demands that he must go through with it, however meaningless and suicidal the fight. Rustam, grown old and worn-out in the service of Iran and her kings, is no match for the younger champion in the prime of manhood and the plenitude of his prowess, and who besides, like Achilles, has a charmed physique. Rustam reluctantly resorts to strata-gem and the stratagem succeeds:

Chu dānist Rustam ki lāba bikār,
Nayāyad hami pīshé Isfandiyār,
Kamān-ra bizih kard-u ān tir-é gaz,
Ki paykānsh-ra dadé bud āb-é raz,
Hamāngeh nihādash wara dar kamān,
Sar-é khish kardash sūyé asmān
Hami guft k'ay Dāvar-é māh-u hūr,
Fazāyanda-é dānish-u farr-u zūr,
Hami bini in pāk jām-é mara,
Rawān-é mara ham tawān-é mara.
Ki man chand kūsham ki Isfandiyār,
Magar sar bigardānad az kārzār,
Tu dāni ki bidād kūshad hami,
Biman jang-u mardi furūshad hami,
Bibādāfarih in gunāham magīr,
Tu ay āfarinanda-é māh-u tīr!
Chu dar kār chandin bididash dirang,
Ki Rustam hami dīr shud sūyé jang,
Bidu guft k'ay Rustam-é nāmdār,
Bishud sīr jān-é tu az kārzār.
Bibini kanun tir-é Gushtāspi,
Dil-é shīr-u paykān-é Luharāspi.
Tahamtan gaz andar kamān rānd zūd
Bidān sān ki sīmurgh farmuda būd.
Bizad rāst bar chashm-é Isfandiyār.
Siyeh shud jehān pish-é ān nāmdār.
Khum āwurd bālāyé sarv-é suhi,

Azu dūr shud dānish-u farrahi.
Nigun shud sar-é shah-é Yazdān-parast,
Biyuftād chāchi kamānash zi dast.
Chunin guft Rustam bi Isfandiyār,
Ki āwurdi ān tukhm-é zifti bibār.
Tu āni ki gufti ki Ruintanam,
Buland āsmān ra zamin bar zanam?
Man az tu sad-u shast tīr-é khadang,
Bikhurdam nanālidam az nām-u nang,
Biyak tīr bar gashti az kārzār,
Bikhufti barin bāra-é nāmdār!

Rustam had been sore wounded in his combat with Isfandiyar. In despair he seeks help from the Simurgh, who points out that Isfandiyar is invulnerable except in his eyes, and tells Rustam to make a forked arrow and shoot it into Isfandiyar's eyes. On the final day of battle Rustam once again tries to persuade Isfandiyar to give up his unhallowed purpose of dragging Rustam bound hand and foot before king Gushtásp. But in vain. He then prays to God to forgive him for what he is driven to do in desperation to save his honour, and shoots the double-pointed arrow straight at the eyes of Isfandiyar, even as the Simurgh had directed. The Prince was instantly blinded. "The world grew dark before him. His straight manly stature stooped low; and he lost all consciousness. His head fell forward and the bow slipped out of his hand." Then spake Rustam: "You have brought to fruition that tree of iniquity which you planted. Are you not he who vaunted, 'I am brazen-bodied, I can dash down the lofty heavens upon the earth?' I suffered one hundred and sixty arrow wounds from you; but for the sake of my name and fame I never breathed one word of complaint. You were finished from the fight by a single shot, and now lie low helplessly upon your noble steed."

BEZHUN

Another youthful and dashing warrior whose features Firdousi has delineated with a fond and firm hand is Bezhum. He is the son of Gīv and the grandson of Rustam, by his daughter Bānu Gushasp, thus inheriting the illustrious blood of two mighty and renowned houses, those of Sām and the

blacksmith Kāveh who raised the standard of revolt against Zahhāk. He is foremost in every field of battle and every adventurous enterprise. He is a typical knighterrant, brave, impetuous, romantic and adventurous. The story of his love for Manijeh, daughter of Afrāsiyāb, is one of the great love stories of romantic literature. He is prominent among the knights of Kay Khusrav's Round Table; and after brilliant feats of valour and chivalry perishes in the storm which overwhelms those who persist in accompanying that monarch on his last mysterious journey. When Kay Khusrav calls upon his knights to undertake the dangerous expedition of destroying the hordes of wild boars in a district on the borders of Turan, nobody is prepared to launch upon the venture. Bezhun steps boldly forward and, in spite of his father Giv's warning, marches away. He accomplishes the task successfully; but his companion Gurgin treacherously involves him in a love affair with Afrāsiyāb's daughter Manijeh. Manijeh falls desperately in love with the youth, drugs him, and carries him off to her palace. There, in the midst of a revelry, Bezhun is surprised by the soldiers of Afrāsiyāb. But alone and unarmed as he is he defies the host :—

"Bezhun recoiled upon himself, and said to himself, 'how can I fight unclad and unarmed as I am I am not mounted on my Shabrang, nor even upon a serviceable hack. Verily fortune has to-day turned its back upon me. Where, O, where are Gīv and Gūdarz of the House of Kashwād, that I should have thus to throw away my life gratis?' He, however, always carried a sharp dagger concealed in his boot. He clutched at it and drew it from its scabbard, held the door of his apartment, and shouted 'I am Bezhun of the House of Kashwād, the prince of paladins and free lances. None but he whose trunk is tired of its head, can do so much as scratch my skin. And even though all the world should turn topsy-turvy with commotion, none will ever see my back in flight from the field of battle.'"

He is however overpowered and taken captive. Afrāsiyāb condemns him to death. But his life is spared at the intercession of the prudent Pírán, and he is imprisoned in a dark dungeon-pit. Manijeh is disgraced and driven out of doors. She, however, nobly stands by her lover, begs for

bread from door to door, and cheers and sustains Bezhun in his hideous ordeal. King Kay Khusrav ultimately discovers the place of Bezhun's incarceration by means of his divining-cup (*Jām-é-Jehān-numa*) and deputes Rustam to rescue him. Rustam arrives in Turan disguised as a merchant, meets Manijeh and sends his signet-ring concealed in a roast fowl to Bezhun. When Bezhun saw and recognised the ring, he laughed a mighty laugh of merriment from the bottom of the black pit, so much so that Manijeh for a moment thought he had gone raving mad.

Chu bār-e derakht-é wafa ra bidīd,
Bidānist k'āmad ghamash-ra kilīd.
Bikhandīd khandīdani shāhwār,
Chunan k'amad awāzash az chāhsār.

Manijeh asks him the reason, but Bezhun hesitates to take her into his confidence saying that, even though a woman's lips may be sealed up, still her tongue cannot be kept from wagging :

Kigar lab bidūzi zi bhré gazand,
Zanān-ra zabān ham namānad biband.

The noble girl naturally protests against such undeserved distrust, and Bezhun tells her the secret. At night-fall Rustam with seven men of his retinue repairs to the mouth of the pit which is covered with a huge stone. The seven men are unable to move the rock from its place. Ultimately Rustam lifts it and hurls it away, and takes Bezhun out. But Rustam would not be Rustam if he stole away in the night with his precious child whom he had rescued from such peril with so much difficulty. He proclaims his resolve to repair to Afrāsiyāb's palace and beard the lion in his den :

Ki man imshab az kin-é Afrasiāb,
Na ārām yābam na khurd-u na khwab.
Yaki kār sāzam kanun bar darash,
Ki farda bikhandad hama lashkarsh.

"I shall not rest to-night from wreaking vengence on Afrāsiyāb. I shall achieve a feat at his very door-step of such a character that tomorrow morn all his army shall laugh in his face."

So he, Bezhun and the seven soldiers carry fire and sword into the royal palace. As Khāqāni sings :

Chu Bezhun dāri andar chih makhusp Afrāsiyābasa,
Ki Rustam dar kamīn ast-u nihangi zīr-é khaftānash.

"When you keep Bezhun confined in a pit do not sleep secure like Afrāsiyāb; for Rustam is in ambush and his sword is ready at his side, under his armour."

RUSTAM'S RAKHSH.

Among the warriors of Iran Rustam's heroic horse certainly deserves a distinguished place. The poet has dwelt lovingly upon his qualities and career. Rakhsh is par excellence the hero as horse in all literature. He is endowed with almost human qualities, and is portrayed as worthy of his mighty master in every respect. He is the lifelong companion of Rustam and shares his labours, dangers, tribulations and triumphs throughout his long and strenuous career. His exploits are described in a thrilling manner. He remains invincible to the end, and at last passes away in the same breath as his heroic master.

Rustam at the outset of his career had great difficulty in securing a mount capable of bearing the weight of his body and armour. He had tried a number of powerful horses; but none could stand his weight. Then comes a mare with her colt, so fierce and powerful, that she would suffer nobody to approach her young. Rustam goes to the grazing ground, throws his lasso on the foal and captures him. The dam comes rushing like a furious elephant, but is cowed by the sound of Rustam's voice. She receives a blow with his fist and lies quivering in the dust :

Rustam tries the colt and finds him in all respects capable of carrying him and his armour. He then asks the keeper for its price. His reply is :

"If thou art Rustam, go set Iran in order mounted upon him. The price of this colt is the whole Kingdom of Iran. With him you shall be able to set right the affairs of the earth."

His physical features are thus described :

"Behind her (the dam) came a foal worthy of her stature, whose chest and haunches were of goodly breadth. He was

dark-eyed, a piebald bay, black-balled, fierce, and steel-hoofed. His body was all painted over like red rose-petals upon a yellow ground. He was so sharp-sighted that he could make out the foot-tracks of an ant on black cloth in a dark night from a distance of two leagues. He was of the strength of an elephant huge of stature, and in courage like the lion of Mount Behistun. Then Rustam questioned "What horse is this, whose two haunches are without any brand or mark?" They answered "do not ask for his brand, for there are strange tales of him. We call him Rakhsh, and he is a dappled bay. In virtue he is liike running water; and in speed like fire We do not know anybody who can master him. We simply call him the Rakhsh of Rustam."

In the Seven Labours, Haft-Khwān, of Rustam, Rakhsh bears a worthy part fighting and killing a fierce tiger, much to the consternation of Rustam when he wakes up and sees what the horse has done during his slumbers in the jungle. "O thou foolish Rakhsh, who asked you to fight this tiger? What would have been my plight if by chance thou shouldst have been killed?" Next, when Rustam is again asleep, leaving Rakhsh to graze in the forest, a wily and hideous dragon creeps up to destroy them. Rakhsh on seeing it, stamps his hoof and neighs to rouse Rustam; when Rustam wakes up the wily beast hides itself and disappears. Rustam is surprised at his horse's behaviour and goes to sleep again. Immediately the dragon reappears, and Rakhsh again rouses Rustam. But the dragon disappears and Rustam becomes angry and warns Rakhsh. The warrior resumes his sleep, the serpent again approaches and there is a cruel conflict in the breast of the noble horse. His anxiety for his master's safety proves stronger than his fear of himself, and he wakes up Rustam once again, just in time to see and slay the dragon.

So again when Rustam goes out on his last ride over the treacherous ground prepared by his step-brother, Shugād, Rakhsh instinctively divines the danger and is reluctant to proceed. Rustam becomes angry, and strikes the noble animal with his riding-whip,

Dil-é Rustam az Rakhsh shud pur zi khashm,
Zamāna khirad-ra bipūshid chashm.

"Rustam became angry towards Rakhsh; Fate blinded the eye of his intellegence;"—

and he is goaded on to take the fatal jump; and both rider and horse plunge into the pit of death.

SASSANIAN WARRIORS

Ardashir, the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, is portrayed as brave, dashing, adventurous and resourceful, capable of facing great perils and taking swift decisions. Like many of his descendants, he is both a soldier and administrator, and laid truly and well the foundations of an empire which endured for 400 years. His successors, Shapur I and Shapur II, great generals and capable rulers as they were, are somewhat summarily disposed of; whereas in the case of Bahrām Gūr and Noushirwān disproportionate space appears to be devoted to their reigns. Not that they were not great and successful rulers, but there is so little of action of real historical and national importance in their reigns. In the case of Bahrām Gūr numerous anecdotes are narrated which. interesting in themselves, are of no particular significance. In the account of Noushirwān's reign whole chapters are devoted to mere harangues and moralisings which have not even the merit of clear thinking or lucid expression. Firdousi was here obviously working on pre-existing materials, and considered it his duty to versify the moral or political tracts in Pahlavi relating to the period. The seven *bazm*, or seances of Būzurjamihr, are in the main mere repetitions of a confused ethical code which lays down no clear rules of conduct and leads nowhere.

BAHRAM CHUBIN

There is considerably more of real historical and even heroic action in the account of Khusrav Parvīz with the towering and impressive figure of Bahrām Chūbin. Bahrām is the last of the great Iranian warriors, a man of strong physique and personality, ambition, courage, resource and decision, but deficient in the pure loyalty and single-minded devotion to king and country, which distinguished his great forbears of earlier eras. The strength of his character is visible in his strong and harsh physical features :—

Bibāla darāz-u biandām khushk,
Bigird-é sarash j'ād mūi chu mushk.
Qavi ustakhānha wa bīnī buzurg,
Siyehcharde-u tund-gūy-u suturg.

"Long and lanky in body, with a withered frame, and a shock of thick dark hair round his head. Strong of bone, with a huge nose, dark-complexioned, bold, and harsh of speech."

When king Hormuz consults him as to whether he should give fight to or make peace with Sāwashah who has invaded Iran, Bahram's reply is bold and decisive :—

The warrior answered bold: "Peace is not possible with Sāwashah. Should he prepare for battle to suggest peace would be equivalent to defeat. Besides, the enemy would be emboldened when he sees that you suppress your desires. To bring forward peaceful proposals in the time of war is no better than subordination to the opponent. Give battle to the malignant enemy; fire and water cannot flow along the same channel. If your views are otherwise this old firmament will look for a new ruler. When we shall learn to rely upon the strength of our own arm, we shall exhibit all the skill and art that we possess."

But decadence has already set in; the faith and chivalry of the past are fast disappearing, and neither Bahrām nor his antagonist Khusrav Parvīz is a pure, unstained figure of heroic virtue. Treachery, intrigue, cruelty, secret murder, and corruption in all shapes, are undermining both loyalty and the stability of the state. The end is near.

Chapter XVII

FIRDOUSI'S WOMEN

RUDABEH

If Firdousi has excelled in the portraiture of manly knights and warriors, he has been no less successful in the delineation of feminine grace and charm. The women in the Shahnama are few but fascinating, combining feminine charm with individual vigour of a rare type. The most prominent among them are Rūdabeh, Tahmina, Gurdāfarid, Firangis, Manījeh and Katáyún. Perhaps Rudābeh, the wife of Zāl

and mother of Rustam, is the most forceful and fascinating of all, though Manijeh appears to be the finest and most completely developed of his heroines. Rudabeh is cast in a heroic mould, strong, fearless, passionate, resolute and resistless in her love, a true daughter of the mountains, fit to bear and rear a race of heroes. She sets her heart on Zāl, in spite of his physical blemish, white hair, which he had from birth, and, which repelled many persons including his own father, and loves him with a mighty and vehement love which brooks no obstacle, no opposition :

Ki man āshaqi am chu bahr-é damān,
Kazu mouj khīzad sūyé asmān.
Puraz mihr-é Zāl ast roushan dilam,
Bikhwāb andar andīsha zu nagsilam.
Dil-u jān-u hūsham pur az mihr-é oust,
Shab-u rūzam andisha-é chihr-é oust.

"I am a lover like the raging ocean whose billows rise upto the skies. My shining heart is full of love for Zāl; even in sleep I cannot shut out his thoughts from me. My heart, soul and mind are filled with love for him. Day and night I yearn for his face.

In the pursuit of her love Rudābeh makes light of all perils and difficulties, and neither her mother's disapprobation nor her father's anger, which might indeed mean death, deflects her in the slightest degree from her purpose. She is typical of the active woman-lover, who herself takes the initiative and plans a meeting between herself and her beloved. Her love is ardent, determined, full-blooded, self-assertive, single-minded. Her maidens disparage her choice, and try to persuade her that, with her grace and features, she could have the best in the land for husband :—

Tura ba chunin rūy-u bāla-u mūi,
Zi charkh-é chahārum khur āyad-t shūi
Bibālāy-é tu dar chaman sarv nist
Chu rukhsar-é tu tābish-e parv nist.

"With such a face and figure and hair—the Sun himself would come down from the fourth heaven to claim thee for his bride. There is no cypress of thy stature in the garden; the light of the Pleaedes does not equal the glow on thy cheek."

The meeting between the lovers is one of the finest and most ardent love-scenes in poetry, and may well be compared with the famous balcony scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* :

Chu Khurshid-é tābandeh shud nāpadīd,
Dar-é hujra bastand-u gum shud kilīd,
Sipahbud sūy-é kākh bin'mud rūy,
Chunān chun buvad mardum-é juft-jūy.
Barāmad siyeh chashm-é gulrukh bibām,
Chu sarv-é sahi bar sarash māh-é tām,
Chu az dūr Dastān-é Sām-é Sawār,
Padid āmad in dukhtar-é nāmdār,
Du bijādé bugshād-u āwāz dād,
Ki shād āmadi, ay jawanmard, shād!
Durūd-é Jehan-āfrin bar tu bād
Khum-é charkh-é gardān zamin tu bād!
Payādeh bidin sān zi parda-sarāy,
Biranjīdi ān khusrawāni du pāy.
Sipahbud chu az bāra āwā shanīd,
Nigih kard-u khurshīd rukh-ra bidīd;
Shuda bām azu gouhar-é tābnāk,
Zi tāb-é rukhash surkh yāqut khāk.
Chunin dād pāsukh ki ay māh-chihr,
Durūdat zi man āfrin az sipihr!
Ché māye shabān dīdeh andar samāk,
Khurūshan budam pīshé Yazdān-é pāk.
Hami khwastam ta Khudā-é jehān
Numāyad biman rūyat andar nihān.

"When the shining sun disappeared the doors of the chamber were closed and the golden key was lost, (when the Sun set and it was night) Zāl like a love-lorn swain started for his beloved's bower. The black-eyed, rose-cheeked beauty came out upon the balcony even like a stately cypress with the full moon upon its head. When Zāl appeared at a distance the damsel opened her two ruby lips and shouted "You are welcome, O youth, you are welcome! The blessings of the Creator on thee, and may the arc of the revolving dome be the floor under thy feet! Why hast thou given trouble to thy royal feet in walking all this distance from thy camp?" When

the Chieftain heard her voice he looked up and saw the Sunfaced damsel. The whole balcony had become like a brilliant gem by the light of her face, and the ground glowed like a red ruby by the fire of her cheek. He replied "O shining Moon! my greetings and heaven's blessings upon thee! How many nights have I been praying to the Lord with my eyes fixed upon the stars that He may for once show me in secret thy lovely face!"

But what a difference between these fortunate, full-blooded oriental lovers and the sentimental ill-starred couple of Verona!

It is characteristic of this oriental Juliet, who is also something of an amazon, that when Zāl, standing at the foot of the battlement on which she stands asks her to contrive some means whereby they may meet, without a moment's hesitation she unlooses her tresses and lets them down so as to enable her lover to climb:—

And this heroic act is accompanied by equally heroic language:—

Kanun zūd bar tāz-u barkash miyān,
Bar-é shīr bugshāy-u chung-é Kayān.
Bigīr in siyeh gīsu az yak suyam,
Zi bihra tu bāyad hami gisūyam!
Azān parwarānidam in tār-ra,
Ki ta dastgīri kunad yār-ra!

"Now hasten, gird up thy loins, be bold and employ thy kingly hands. Catch hold of these dark tresses of mine from one end—my hair is meant for thee. I have grown these luxuriant locks all these years in order that they may serve as a help and handle for my lover."

Zāl however only kisses the locks, and ultimately climbs up with the help of his lasso.

The course of true love of course does not run smooth. Both Sām and Mehrāb (her father) are exceedingly doubtful about the issue of this union:

Azin murgh-parwarda ān divzād,
Chigūna barāyad hamāna nizhād?

"From this creature reared by a bird (Zāl was brought up by the Sīmurgh) and that daughter of the demon (Rudābeh was descended from Zahhāk) what kind of issue will come?"

However, after the customary tribulations and waiting they marry, and the result is Rustam!

TAHMINA

Tahmina, Rustam's wife, is also cast in a heroic mould. To compass her love she resorts to a clever strategem. Learning that Rustam is hunting in the neighbourhood, she has his famous charger, Rakhsh, stolen, so that the warrior may be forced to visit her native town in search of his mount. Rustam arrives at her father's court, naturally not in the best of humours. We have three distinct pictures of Tahmina: First, when she boldly enters Rustam's bedchamber in the dead of night and declares her love. This is a unique scene. The world-renowned warrior, tired and harrassed at the loss of his horse, is sleeping heavily in a strange place. To him enters in the dark hours of the night a strange woman of dazzling beauty and imperial grace:

Chu yak bihra zān tira shab dar guzasht,
Shab-āhang bar charkh-é gardān bigasht,
Sukhun gufta āmad nihufta birāz,
Dar-é khwābgih narm kardand bāz.
Yaki banda sham'í muambar bidast,
Kharāmān biyāmad bibalin-é mast.
Pas-é banda andar yaki māhrūi,
Chu khurshīd-é tābān puraz rang-u būi.
Du abru kamān-u du gīsu kamand,
Bibāla bikirdār-é sarv-é buland,
Bunāgūsh tābanda khurshīd wār,
Furu hishta zu halqa-é gūshwār.
Labān az tabarzad zabān az shekar,
Dihānash mukallal bidurr-u gohar.
Sitara nihān karda zīr-é aqīq,
Tu gufti wara Zuhra āmad rafiq.
Rawānash khirad būd-u tan jān-é pāk,
Tu gufti ki bihra nadārad zi khāk!

"When one half of the dark night had passed, and Sirius rolled upon the revolving dome, veiled whisperings were heard,

and the door of the sleeping-chamber was softly opened. A maid holding a scented candle in her hand came walking towards the heavy sleeper. Behind the maid a moon-faced beauty, full of colour and fragrance, and blazing like the Sun. Her two eyerbows were like the bow, and her tresses like the lasso; in stature she was like a stately cypress. Her earlobes shone like the Sun, and brilliant earrings hung down from the lobes. Her lips were of sugar-candy, her tongue too was sugar, and her mouth was studded with pearls and gems. Behind her ruby lips were ranged bright stars (teeth). You might say she was the equal of Venus. Her soul was pure Reason, and her body clear spirit. You might say she had no trace of clay in her constitution."

Well may Rustam be staggered at the sight! He asks her who she is and what she wants with him in the dark night. Her answer is direct and noble!

Chunin dād pāsukh ki Tahmīna-am
Tu gūyi ki az gham bidu nīma-am
Yaki dukht-é shah-e Samangān manam,
Zi pusht-é huzhabr-u pilangān manam.
Bigīti zi shāhān mara juft nist,
Chu man ziré charkh-é barin andakist.
Kas az purda bīrūn nadīda mara,
Na hargiz kas āwā shanīda mara.
Bi kirdār-é afsāna az har kasi,
Shanīdam zi tu dāstānha basi.
Ki az shīr-u dīv-u pilang-u nihang,
Na tarsi wa hasti chunin tīz chung;
Shab-é tira tanha bi Turān shawi,
Bigardi darān marz-u ham naghnavi.
Berahna chu tigh-é tu bīnad uqāb,
Nayarad bi nakhchīr kardan shitāb.
Nishān-é kamān-é tu dārad huzhabr,
Zi bīm-é senān-é tu khūn bārad abr.
Chunin dāstānha shanidam zi tu,
Basi lab bidandān gazidam zi tu.
Bijustam hami kift-u yāl-u barat,
Bidin shihr kard Īzad ābashkhurat,
Tura-am kanun gar bikhwāhi mara,
Nabīnad hami murgh-u māhi mara.

"She answered straight: "I am Tahmina; you might say I am cut in two by my anguish and longing. I am a daughter of the King of Samangān, and derive my lineage from lions and tigers. The kings of the world are not fit match for me; there are few like me under the sky. Nobody has ever seen me out of the purda, nor has any man heard my voice. But I heard from everybody strange, marvellous tales of thy prowess. Thou art not afraid of the demon, lion, leopard or crocodile, and art so bold that in the dark nights thou roamest about without rest in the forests of Turan all by thyself. Should the eagle see thy naked sword he would pause before pouncing upon his prey. The tiger bears the marks of thy bow and arrow; the clouds rain bloody tears through fear of thy lance. Such were the tales I heard of thee, and oft did I bite my lip in wonder. And I ever yearned for thy arms and manly figure, when God made this city thy camping-ground. Now I am yours should you wish to have me; neither bird nor fish may ever see me."

Like Desdemona she had fallen in love with the valorous deeds of her hero. Rustam is touched by this noble love, and he asks for her hand from her father and they are married.

After this fateful meeting she had one night of married bliss. Thereafter her whole existence is merged in the birth and bringing up of her heroic son. The next glimpse we get of Tahmina is when the boy Sohrāb, taxed about his unknown parentage by his companions, blusteringly bursts into his mother's presence and demands to know his father's name from her. She answers him with quiet dignity:

Chunin guft mādar ki bishnav sukhun,
Bidān shādmān bāsh-u tundi makun.
Tu pūr-é gav-é pīltan Rustami,
Zi Dastān-é Sāmi-u az Nīrami,
Jehān-āfrin ta jehān āfrīd,
Sawāri chu Rustam nayāmad padīd,
Azira sarat z'āsmān bartar ast,
Ki tukhm-é tu zān nāmwar gouharast!

"To him the mother replied: 'Listen and rejoice at what you hear, but do not be insolent. You are the son of the

famous paladin, Rustam, and of the race of Dastān (Zāl), Sām and Narimān. Since the Creator made this world a warrior like Rustam has never appeared on earth. Your head is exalted above the lofty heavens, because you come of this noble line."

She cautions him to keep this a secret, lest Afrāsiyāb, the over-lord of her father, who is the mortal enemy of Rustam, should learn this and molest them. But Sohrāb in his boyish ardour and bravado casts all caution to the winds.

The last view of her is when learning the death of her youthful son, the idol of her heart, "her beautiful, her brave, her all in all," she appears forlorn and disconsolate, a tragic figure of overpowering pathos, like Niobe all tears, pouring out in unforgettable strains the unfathomable anguish of her broken heart. Sorrow was never brought home to a mortal, even in the remorseless course of the Greek tragedy, in a more cruel, more unbearable form. Tahmina is the grand tragic heroine of this mighty drama. In her vehement grief, her frantic lamentation and despair, she typifies the distracted mother to whom her child is light and life. There is nothing more moving and overwhelming in literature than the picture of Tahmina in her sorrow and distraction:

Hami guft k'ay jāné mādar kanūn,
Kujāī sirishta bikhāk-u bi khūn?
Chi dānistam, ay pūr, k'āyad khabar,
Ki Rustam bikhanjar derīdat jigar?
Derīghash nayāmad azān rūy-é tu!
Azān burz-u bāla-u bāzūy-é tu!
Biparwarda būdam tanat-ra bināz
Bi rakhshanda rūz-u shabān-é daraz.
Kanun man kira gīram andar kinār,
Ki khāhad budan mar mara gham-gusār?
Kira khwānam aknūn bijāy-é tu pīsh,
Kira gūyam in dard-u tīmār-é khish?
Derigha tan-u jān-u chashm-u chirāgh!
Bikhāk andarun mandeh az kākh-u bāgh!
Pidar justi ay pūr-é lashkar panāh,
Bijāy-é pidar gūrat āmad birāh,
Azān pish ku dishna-ra bar kashīd,

Jigar-gāhé sīmin bar-é tu derīd,
Chira ān nishāni ki mādar'-t dād,
Nadādi bidu bar nakardīsh yād?
Hami guft-u mijust-u mikand mūy,
Hami zad kaf-é dast bar khūb-rūy,
Sar-é asp-é oura bibar dar girift,
Bimānda jehāni bidu dar shigift,
Biyāwurd ān jāma-é shāhwār,
Gireftash chu furzand andar kinār,
Dar-é khānha-ra siyeh kard pāk,
Zi kākh-u zi aiwān bar āwurd khak.
Bi pūshid pas jāma-e nīlgūn,
Hamān nīlgun gharqa gashteh bikhūn.
Birūz-u bishab mūya kard-u girīst
Pas az marg-é Sohrāb sāli bizist.
Saranjām ham dar gham-é ou bimurd,
Rawānash bishud sūy-é Sohrāb gurd.

"She cried "O my life! where art thou now weltering in mud and blood? What did I know that this fell tidings that Rustam ripped open thy heart with his dagger would ever come to me! Did he not feel pity for that sweet face of thine, thy form and figure and arms? How fondly I had reared thy body during bright days and dreary nights! Now it is all steeped in blood and covered by the shroud. Whom shall I now take into my arms? Who will be my comfort in grief and pain? Whom shall I call to me in thy stead? To whom can I tell all this pain and anguish of my heart? Alas and alas, Oh my body and soul, light and life! thus lying low in the dust from thy palace and garden! Oh my martial boy! You sought your father; in place of your father your grave accosted you on the road! Before he drew his blade and tore open your silver breast, why did you not show him the mark your mother gave you? Could you not remember it? Why, oh why, did I not accompany you in your campaign, so that you might have become renowned among the warriors of the world! Rustam would have recognised me from a distance, and he would have cherished us both."

Thus she wailed and wept, scratched her cheeks and plucked her hair, and struck her lovely face. Then she fell

down in a swoon and became like one dead. You might say all her blood became frozen. As soon as she came round she resumed her wailing and brooding over her slain son. She held to her breast the head of Sohrab's horse, all the people wondering at her. She took his royal dress and hugged it as though it were her child. She took up his arms, armour, bow, spear, sword and mace, his shield and bridle, and struck her head with the bridle and shield. She blackened all her rooms, and demolished her palaces and mansions. Then she put on the black weeds of woe and these all stained with blood. Thus did she moan and weep day and night, and dragged out her miserable existence for a year after Sohrab's death; and in the end she died of grief for him, and at last her soul flew towards the spirit of her heroic son."

MANIJEH

The next brilliant figure of resplendent beauty and heroic stature is Manijeh, the beloved of Bezhun, and daughter of Afrāsiyāb. It is characteristic of Firdousi that he does not permit national prejudice to mar his female portraits. Rudābeh, although descended from Zahhāk, is pictured as worthy of the best and mightiest Iranian in every respect. Similarly, the daughters of Afrāsiyāb both Firangis and Manijeh, are represented as free from every taint of Turanian vice, and endowed not only with the sceptred race and form divine, but every virtue, every grace, that has ever adorned woman. Manijeh has in common with her great predecessors, Rudābeh and Tahmina, the force of character to go straight to her objective without hesitation. It is curious that, while Firdousi represents these daughters of Turan as brought up in the customary seclusion of the Eastern harem, and subject to the natural coyness of women, each one of them is shown as transported by true love into making active advances such as the free women of the West have seldom made.* Thus Tahmina protects herself against any aspersion of immodesty, by reason of the unconventional situation in which she places herself, by assuring Rustam:

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* In Sassanian history also Firdousi makes both Malika, the daughter of an Arab chieftain who loves Shapur, and Gulnar the damsel who falls in love with Ardashir, take the initiative.

Kas az purda bīrun nadīda mara
Na hargiz kas āwa shanīda mara.

"No one has ever seen me outside the purdah; nor has any man ever heard my voice."

Manijeh also similarly declares:

Manījeh manam dukht-é Afrāsiyāb,
Berahna nadīda tanam āftāb.

"I am Manijeh, the daughter of Afrāsiyāb, even the universal Sun has not seen my body bare."

Manijeh's devotion to her lover through thick and thin is as remarkable as the boldness and initiative with which she secures him:

She invites Bezhun into her pavilion, makes love to him without ceremony, and in the end drugs him and carries him off to her palace, a procedure as dangerous as daring. She is, on the discovery of her alliance with an enemy of her father and country, cast off and literally thrown upon the streets; but she comforts and succours her lover who is imprisoned in a dungeon, as best she could, until help arrives in the person of Rustam, and both she and Bezhun are rescued by the prowess and resource of that mighty champion.

Afrāsiyāb's indignation at his daughter's rash and disreputable proceedings is by no means unnatural. He is entitled to sympathy:

Bibini kizin bihunar dukhtaram,
Ché ruswāi āmad bipirān saram.
Hama nām-é pūshida rūyān-é man,
Zi purda bigustard bar anjuman.
Kizin nang ta jāwedan bar daram
Bikhandad hama kishwar-u lashkaram

"Do you not see what disgrace has come upon me in my old age on account of this worthless daughter of mine? She has laid in the dust before the public all the good name of my veiled ones, for which shame my whole kingdom and army would laugh at me for ever."

Bezhun's life is spared at the intercession of Pīrān, but he is chained in a pit, and Manijeh is disgraced and driven out of doors:

"Manijeh came with a single cloth upon her body, bare-headed and bare-footed. She was dragged to that pit, her eyes full of tears. They said to her 'here is your house and home, you are devoted eternally to this captive.' At sunrise every day Manijeh used to beg bread from door to door, collect the crumbs the life-long day, and bring it to the aperture at the mouth of the pit. She would give the bread to Bezhun and weep; and in this way she led a miserable life."

Her reward comes when, after their liberation by Rustam, she and Bezhun arrive at the court of King Kay Khusrav, when that noble king receives her warmly, bestows treasures upon her and exhorts Bezhun to treat her well:

He ordered Bezhun 'take all these treasures to that woe-worn girl. Do not harrass her in any way and never speak hard cold words to her. Think of all the suffering you have brought upon her. Spend your life in joy with her, and ever bear in mind the vicissitudes of time.' "

FIRANGIS

Firangis like Manijeh is a daughter of the Turanian king, also wedded to an Iranian prince. But her marriage to Prince Siāwush is not clandestine, as is the union of Manijeh and Bezhun, but has the full approval of her father. Siāwush rendered desperate by the intrigues and calumny of his step-mother, Sudābeh, and the capricious and uncertain temper of his father Kay Kāus, goes into exile and seeks refuge at the court of Afrāsiyāb. There he is received at first with a cordial welcome and the honour due to his rank; and Afrāsiyāb gives him his daughter Firangis in marriage. All goes on well for a time; but in the end the young Prince falls a victim to court intrigues and jealousies; and Afrāsiyāb commits the most atrocious crime and the most fatal blunder of his career, by ordering Siāwush to be put to death. He is guilty of the murder of an innocent man, a prince of royal blood, the husband of his daughter, and an honoured guest who has sought his hospitality and protection. Like the

murder of Iraj by his ancestor Tūr, it not only confirmed the hereditary feud between Iran and Turan, but started a fresh conflagration, which was only extinguished with blood of countless legions and the extinction of Afrāsiyab's empire and dynasty.

Firangis shares the grace and beauty of the other princesses described in the Shahnama:

Firangīs mihtar zi khūban-é ouy,
Nabini bigīti chunān rūy-u mūy.
Bibāla zi sarv-é suhi bartar ast,
Zi mushk-é siyeh bar sarash afsar ast.
Du rukhsāra zibāsh mislé qamar,
Du chashmash sitāra biwaqt-é sahar.
Dihān-u labash būd gouher fishān,
Sukhun guftanash būd gouher nishān.
Ferishta bikhūy-u chu amber bibūy,
Bidil mihrbān-u bijān mihrjūy.
Nabud andaru nīz yak chīz zisht,
Tu gufti magar hūr būd az bihisht!

"Firangis is the eldest of his beauteous daughters; you will not see on earth such a face and hair. In stature she is superior to the straight cypress; on her head is a crown of dark and fragrant musk. Her cheeks are fair as the moon; her eyes are bright and beauteous like the morning star. Her mouth and lips shed jewels, and her speech is like pearls. She is an angel in virtue and fragrant like ambergris, loving of heart and yearning for love. There is not a single blemish in her; you might say she is a Houri come down from Paradise."

Firangis makes a fond and devoted wife and mother, and like Farānak, the mother of Faridun, she undergoes dangers and hardships to save her child from the pursuit and persecution of his enemies. But she has not the heroic stature of Rudābeh and Manijeh, and is cast in a softer, altogether feminine mould. She plays a somewhat passive role and in the end is easily persuaded to remarry.

KATAYUN

Katāyūn, the wife of King Gushtāsp and the mother of Prince Isfandiyār, is another of Firdousi's famous heroines.

Like Siāwush, Prince Gushtāsp is in exile in Rum, a fugitive from his father's court. His position and parentage are unknown, and he lives in obscurity in a foreign land apprenticed to a blacksmith.

He accomplishes incognito some marvellous feats of arms in the land of his exile, and Katāyun, the daughter of the King of Rum, falls in love with him in spite of his apparently low station and obscure lineage. With the unerring instinct of true love she recognizes the high blood and indomitable spirit behind the humble exterior, and bestows her hand upon the disguised prince in a gathering of suitors, which included the aristocracy of the land and its neighbourhood:

Ki mardi guzin kard azin anjuman,
Bibāla chu sarv-é suhi dar chaman.
Birukh chun gulistān-u ba yāl-u kift,
Ki harkish bibinad bimānad shigift.
Tu gūyi magar farra-é Izadīst,
Wa liken nadānim oura ki kīst.

"She selected from that assemblage a man straight like the cypress—in face like the garden, with a splendid frame and arms, such that whoever saw him was steeped in wonder. You might say he has divine glory shining upon him; but nobody knows who he is."

When the King her father is shocked at her humble choice he is answered spiritedly:—

Bidukhtar tu gufti ki ambāz jūy,
Nagufti ki shāhi sarafrāz jūy.

"You told your daughter to select a mate, and not merely an exalted prince."

She found in the blacksmith's apprentice a mate worthy of her station and spirit, and Gushtāsp found in her a noble consort fit to bear him a race of heroes. She bore Isfandiyar. She fills with grace and dignity the role of mother, wife and queen, and is in every respect worthy of her high lineage and exalted position.

In Sassanian history we have some notable women such as Gulnár who elopes with Ardashir, Mālika, the Arab maid,

who falls in love with Shāpur, Gurdiya the sister of Bahrām Chūbin who is noted both for her warlike feats and statesmanship, and Shīrīn the queen of Khusrav Parviz.

CHAPTER XVIII

DRAWBACKS.

The Shahnama has many of the drawbacks and defects of epic poetry in general. In large portions, as noted before, it is not poetry at all but simply a versified chronicle. It suffers from its inordinate length; and long chapters are dull and monotonous in the extreme. This failing it shares with all the great epics of the world. Firdousi in more places than one speaks of his poem as consisting of 60,000 couplets. In point of fact most of the modern texts of the Shahnama fall considerably short of that number. But even as it stands, the Shahnama is much longer than most of the great epics of the world, except the Mahabharat. It is beyond the power of the human intellect to sustain poetic effort at a uniform level of excellence throughout such gigantic works; and the Muse takes magnificent flights alternately with periods of quiescence and langour. Even Homer nods. It has been said of Milton that, if he had died after completing the first two Books of Paradise Lost, he would have left behind the most marvellous fragment of poetry in all literature. But he went on; and immediately after the exordium to the Third Book his muse appears exhausted, there is a distinct drop, and he never again rises to the full height of his argument. Firdousi renovates himself continually till the last, and soars again and again upon a powerful wing into the clear empyrean of great poetry. In dāstāns like Rustam and Sohrāb, or Rustam and Isfandiyar, there is scarcely a dull passage or a feeble line. In other places, for hundreds of verses, he is insufferably dull and monotonous. More tiring than mere monotony is sheer repetition of scene and situation, idea and sentiment, phrase and figures of speech. Firdousi is the greatest of war-poets; and no writer, ancient or modern, surpasses him in spirited descriptions of battle, both general engagements and single combats. Yet a large number of his battle scenes are mere repetitions; the same technique, the same clash of arms, the same hurling of challenge and defiance, the

same similes and metaphors,—the only difference being the names of the combatants. Similarly, his kings, at the time of their accession almost invariably indulge in harangues before the assembled court. The fashion starts with Jamshid and ends with Yezdegird. Scores of lines in this connection are absolute repetitions of the same ideas and sentiments in almost identical language. There is again a similar repetition of thought, sentiment and language in numerous letters which his princes and warriors address to one another. The stock reflections upon the instability of the world and the vanity of human greatness, are also repeated with fatiguing frequency at regular intervals. A good many single lines are also repeated with slight variations throughout the poem; and certain similes and metaphors he has simply ridden to death. On the other hand, one English writer at least notes Firdousi's "diversity of matter and incident," and observes that this variety is "infinitely more charming than the successive council of gods, a feast, a fight, a fight, a feast, and a council of gods, which imparts to Iliad a sameness rather apt to be tiresome."*

Firdousi has other limitations which are not merely the limitations of the class or kind of poetry which he essayed. He has hardly any humour; although in justice it must be conceded that humour in general is out of place in great poetry,—at least in the epic, although it is permissible in great tragedies. He also set the fashion,—or at any rate emphasised the tendency of the Iranian mind,—to indulge in hyperbole to an almost ludicrous extent.

One rather curious feature of the Shahnama is the absence of any child characters. It is amazing that in so broad and varied a canvas there should be no description of child-life as such. Rustam's exploit in killing the white elephant as a child is simply the description of a precocious fighter. Nowhere does the poet describe the innocence, the playfulness, the artless prattle, the sunny laughter, of child-hood. There is no scene corresponding to Shakespeare's Arthur and Hubert; although in the story of Sohráb Firdousi might well have conceived of parallel situations Sohráb,

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*"Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia", by Robert M. Binning, Madras Civil Service.—(2 Vols. Allen, 1857).

though young in years, always speaks and acts like a full-grown warrior. There is no evidence in the whole narrative to show that Firdousi had any particular fondness for children. The schoolboy Búzurjamihr is described not as a schoolboy, but as a sage in embryo, although his teacher is described as maintaining the traditional attitude of pedagogue towards pupil.

Still more notable is the entire absence of any love for the lower animals on the part of the poet. There is no passage in the whole poem indicating interest in animals as such. Animals enmass, horses, elephants, camels, wild boar, deer, lions and leopards, are mentioned, but only as fulfilling their functions in the economy of nature and human life.

There is only one animal whose individual character and existence the poet has depicted fondly and minutely—Rustam's Rakhsh. In a slight degree Behzád the horse of Siáwush, and Purmáyeh the cow that nurtured Farídun, are also individually and sentimentally described.

The Iranians are not fond of dogs, and Firdousi is no exception. The dog is scarcely ever mentioned in the Shahnama, except in connection with the chase, or as a term of opprobrium and contempt. There is nothing in the Iranian epic to compare with that noble and beautiful passage in which Yudhishthira in the Mahabharat refuses to enter Swarga, unless the bar is lifted against his faithful dog and he is admitted as well into the abode of the blest; or the passage in the Odyssey, in which the old faithful dog of Ulysses looks into his master's face and dies.

There are similarly no noticeable references to bird life. Besides the fabulous Simurg, Firdousi generally refers, figuratively, or in actual descriptions of the chase, to birds of prey like the vulture, the eagle and the falcon, and their quarries, the pigeon, the crane and the lark. The Bulbul, of course, is constantly mentioned, but in a more or less conventional manner. At times, in the descriptions of natural scenery, he alludes to pheasants, partridges and peacocks. What is noteworthy is that not one of his numerous male or female characters in the Shahnama is represented as display-

ing any particular fondness for birds or animals, except, of course, the horse. This indifference to the lower creation is more a national than an individual deficiency. The breadth of Firdousi's humanity is seen in the noble plea for universal sympathy, even for the meanest creatures, which he puts in the mouth of Iraj:

Another unattractive feature of Firdousi noticeable in his poetry is an overfondness for money and the good things of life. This is to be observed not only in the pitiful and persistent appeals for a suitable reward made to his patron, but in the gusto with which he describes and details treasures and riches, royal gifts, and princely presents.

The following is typical of the innumerable passages in which Firdousi describes treasures and riches:—

"The monarch (Manuchehr) then ordered a royal robe of honour to be prepared (for Sám) which was admired by everybody. It consisted of Arab horses with golden saddles, Indian swords with gold scabbards; brocades and furs, rubies and gold; and most costly parchments. There were Rúmi slaves dressed in the rich silks of Rūm, embroidered with jewels upon a ground of gold; plates of emerald and jasper and goblets of turquoise, red gold and virgin silver, filled with musk, camphor and saffron, were carried forward by slaves. So also armours, helmets and coats of mail, spears and maces, bows and arrows; turquoise thrones and golden crowns, ruby rings and gold waist-bands."

Unlike Homer and the great Indian Epics, the Shahnama is deficient in mythology. Although Firdousi speaks in a vague, general sort of way about angels, fairies, demons, sorcerers, witches, etc., he does not fall back upon any fixed, accepted mythology, to elevate his narrative to supernatural heights. His "divs" are little more than savages and wild men outside the pale of Iranian civilisation. He does not personify natural forces, nor does he deify his kings and heroes, however lofty his conception of their character and achievements. So far as the supernatural and the marvellous is concerned, there is little in the Shahnama to compare with the wonders of the Greek and Indian Epics with their

gorgeous and grotesque mythology. The Shahnama, although a true epic, is at the same time a history—a history of heroes—and the exploits and intrigues of gods and goddesses are foreign to its genius. Firdousi's world, though romantic and heroic, is not the magic world of Homer, of the Mahabharat and Ramayana, not even of the Arabian Nights.

CHAPTER XIX

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The Shahnama to its other beauties of form and substance, adds the all-important, the everlasting, merit of style. If for nothing else,—if not for its great historic value, the loftiness of its theme, the purity of its tone, the grandeur of its imagery, its patriotic fervour,—still the Shahnama would live for ever for its style. Firdousi is as distinguished for his style as Milton is for his. Although in the centuries that followed, tens of thousands of verses in the manner and metre of the Shahnama have been written in Persian, no poet has succeeded in emulating Firdousi's style. The two great features of this style are simplicity and majesty. It is a rare combination. Milton is perhaps the most distinguished exponent in English of the majestic manner of poetic utterance. But his expression is ponderous and intricate. His is the stately and elevated speech of a scholar steeped in classical and Biblican lore, with a highly involved syntax, and a select high-sounding vocabulary. Firdousi achieves his style of exceptional distinction and dignity by the use of the simplest possible elements of his native language. He is always simple but never commonplace or vulgar. With a uniform simplicity and dignity, he possesses the necessary variety of expression to suit every occasion and every character. The speech of kings is kingly and of warriors warlike. He is stately and graceful, or plain and simple, soft or stern, smooth or rugged, as the occasion demands. Love, anger, anguish, defiance, exultation, reflection, devotion, despair and every phase of heroic and lyric emotion, find appropriate expression in his matchless verse. But through each various utterance runs the golden thread of his distinguished and felicitous phrase. And this distinction of diction is observable even in his most pedestrian passages. That loftiness and purity of expression which even in

the greatest of his successors is of occasional occurrence, is normal with Firdousi. In stray verses like the following Saadi captures Firdousi's manner:

Jehān ay birādar namānad bikas,
Dil andar Jehān āfrin band-u bas.

* * * * *

Derigha ki bī ma basi ruzgār,
Birūyad gul-u bishgifad lālazār!
Basi Tīr-u Dai māh-u Ardībehisht,
Barāyad ki ma khāk bashīm-u khist!

So also Nizami in a passage like this:

Kharāmidan-e lājwardi sipihr,
Hamān girdīsh-é anjum-u māh-u mihr.
Mapindār kaz bihra bāzigarist.
Sara pardai in chunin sarsarist.
Darin pardeh yak rishta bikār nist.
Sar-é rishta bar ma padīdār nist.

But generally their utterance lacks the simplicity and stately flow of Firdousi's verse.

Firdousi's language is characterized by exceptional purity. He wrote pure Persian avoiding consciously the Arabic vocabulary to the utmost possible limit, if not altogether. In modern, and even classical Persian, the Arabic element is so great that, but for this standing miracle, it would be unthinkable that any considerable poem could be written in Persian without a free use of Arabic words. Fancy Shakespeare or Milton writing in pure Anglo-Saxon! Yet Firdousi did write a practically pure native idiom, without any evidence of infelicity, clumsiness or want of freedom. No single verse of his could be improved in power or beauty by substituting another word for the one he chose. His language is in a sense archaic. But he is clear as daylight; and even a peasant in Iran today can understand and enjoy the Shahnama without effort. An educated Englishman of today would find it difficult to understand the greater part of Chaucer, and, perhaps, even parts of Shakespear. Firdousi is about 400 years older than Chaucer; but his language is alive and goes straight to

the heart of the modern reader like his mother tongue, with just enough of archaism to lend it distinction and charm. The Arabic words which he uses are, generally speaking, inevitable, such as technical military terms, or those that had passed into the current usage of the man in the street in his day. Of all the great poets of the world Fidousi's vocabulary is perhaps the most limited. Yet this simple instrument he found adequate for the expression of the highest poetical and even philosophic ideas. Others in his day and after him have tried similar experiments. The result has been bald and banal. Shibli Nu'máni points out how Firdousi's contemporary, the great scholar and philosopher, Abu Ali Sina (Avicenna) tried to express certain philosophic concepts in the pure Persian of his day in prose, but without success. He sacrificed both clarity and elegance. In contrast take Firdousi's description of creation according to the prevailing cosmogony of his day beginning with the verse:

Az āghāz bāyad ki dāni durust,
Sar-é māya-é gouharān az nakhust.

and ending with the verses:

Nigih kun barin gumbad-é tīzgard,
Ki darmān azūyast wazu nīz dard.
Na gasht-é zamāna bi farsāyadash,
Na in ranj-u tīmār bugzāyadash.
Na az girdish ārām gīrad hami,
Na chun ma tubāhi padhīrad hami.

In this long passage there are only four Arabic words. The rest is pure Persian, and yet how fluently and felicitously he expresses his ideas!

A few samples of the purity, simplicity and dignity of his diction may be taken from almost any place in the Shahnama. These are the opening verses of the epic after the introductory matter:—

Sukhun gûy-é dihqan ché gūyad nakhust,
Ki nām-é buzurgi bigiti ki just?
Ki bud ān ki dihīm bar sar nihād,
Nadārad kas az ruzgāran biyād.

Magar kaz pidar yād dārad pisar,
Bi gūyad tura yak bi yak az pidar.

* * *

Chu āmad biburjé hamal āftāb,
Jehān gasht ba farr-u āieen-u āb.
Bitābid zānsān biburj-é barah
Ki giti jawān gasht zu yaksaruh
Kayumarth shud bar jehān kadkhudāy,
Nakhustin bikūh andarun sākht jāy
Sar-é takht-u bakhtash barāmad zi kūh,
Pilangina pūshīd khud ba gurūh.

The only Arabic word used in this passage is *hamal* for the Zodiacal sign Aries. Here the ideas as well as the language are simple to the verge of baldness. Next, notice how his language, while retaining its purity and simplicity, gains in resonance and majesty as occasion requires in consonance with its subject-matter. Thus Manuchehr addresses his courtiers on his accession in a truly royal speech:—

Manam guft bar takht-é gardān sipihr,
Hamam khashm-u jang ast-u ham dād-u mihr.
Zamin bande-u charkh yār-é man ast,
Sar-é tājdāran shikār-é manast.
Hamam din-u ham farra-é Izadīst,
Hamam bakht-é nīki-u dast-é badīst.
Shab-é tār jūyanda-é kīn manam,
Hamān ātash-é tīz bar zin manam.
Khudāvānd-é shamshīr-u zarrina kafsh,
Farāzanda-é Kāwiāni derafsh!
Farūzanda mīgh-u barāranda tīgh
Bijang andarun jān nadāram derīgh.
Gah-é bazm darya du dast-é man ast,
Dam-e ātash az bar nishast-é manast.
Badān-ra zi bad dast kūteh kunam,
Zamin-ra bikhun rang-é dibeh kunam.
Girāyandé gurz-u numāyandé tāj,
Farūzanda-é mulk bar takht-é āj.
Aba in hunarha yaki banda-am
Jehān-āfrin-ra parastanda-am
Kazu tāj-u takhtast azuyam sipah,

Azuyam sipās-u biduyam panāh.
Birāh-é Farīdun-é farrukh rawīm,
Nayāman kuhun bud agar ma nawim.

The power and majesty of these imperial accents cannot be conveyed in any other language but Firdousi's without degenerating into inflated bombast.

Next take the following lyrical passage descriptive of the charms and beauties of Māzinderān. It is a song, and the language is more graceful and musical, albeit retaining its wonted purity and simplicity:

Bibarbat chu bāyast barsākht rûd,
Barāwurd Māzinderāni sarūd.
Ki Māzinderān shihr-é ma yād bad,
Hamishé bar-u būmash ābād bād!
Ki dar būstānash hamisha gulast,
Hama kūh pur lāla-u sumbulast.
Hawa khushgawār-u zamin pur nigār,
Na garm-u na sard-u hamisha bahār.
Nawāzandé bulbul bibāgh andarūn,
Gurāzandé āhu birāgh andarūn.
Gulābast gūyi bijūaysh rawān,
Hami shād gardad zi būyash rawān.
Dai-u Bahman-u Ādhar-u Farvadīn
Hamisha pur az lāla bini zamīn.
Hama sāleh khandān lab-é jūy bār,
Hama jāy bāz-é shikāri bikar.
Kasi kandar ān būm ābād nist,
Bikām az dil-u jān-é khud shād nist.

Now let us pause over the dying words of Sohrāb with their dramatic power and overwhelming pathos:—

Bipīchīd az ān pas yaki āh kard,
Zi nīk-u bad andīsha kūtāh kard.
Bidu guft kin bar man az man rasīd,
Zamāna bidast-é tu dādam kilid.
Tuzīn bigunāhi ki in kūz pusht,
Mara bar kashīd-u bizāri bikusht.
Bibāzi bipūyand hamsāl-é man,
Bikhāk andar āmad chunin yāl-é man!

Nishān dād mādar mara az pidar,
Bimihr andar āmad rawānam bisar.
Hami justamash ta bibinam'sh rūy,
Chunin jān bidādam bidin ārzūy!
Derīgha ki ranjam biyāmad bisar,
Nadīdam darin hīch rūy-é pidar!
Kanun gar tu dar āb māhi shawi,
Waya chun shab andar siyāhi shawi,
Wagar chun sitāra shawi bar sipihr,
Biburri zi rūy-é zamin pāk mihr,
Bikhwāhad ham az tu pidar kīn-é man,
Chu bīnad ki khishtast balīn-é man.

As a specimen of a more ornate, elaborate and gorgeous manner to suit the occasion there is nothing in Persian poetry to beat the following lyric prelude to the story of Bezhun and Manijeh. It is remarkable also for something very rare in Persian poetry—creating an atmosphere.

Shabi chun shebah rūy-shusta biqīr,
Na Bahram payda na Kāywān na Tir,
Digar gūna āryashi kard māh,
Basiché guzar kard bar pīshgāh.
Shuda tireh andar sarāy-é dirang,
Mayān karda barīk-u dil karda tang.
Zi tājash seh bihra shuda lājward,
Sipurdeh hawāra bizingār-u gard.
Sipāh-é shab-é tir-a dar dasht-u rāgh,
Yaki farsh afkanda chun parr-é zāgh.
Chu pulād zingār khurda sipihr,
Tu gufti biqīr andar andūda chihr.
Namūdam zi harsu bichashm āhriman,
Chu mār-é siyeh bāz karda dihan
Haran gih ki bar zad yaki bād-é sard,
Chu zangi bar angīkht z'angisht gard.
Chunān gasht bāgh-u lab-é jūy-bār
Kuja mouj khīzad zi daryā-é qar
Furūmanda gardūn-é gardān bijāy,
Shuda sust khurshid-ra dast-u pāy.
Zamin zīr-é ān chādar-é qirgūn
Tu gufti shudasti bikhwāb andarūn.

Jehān-ra dil az khishtan pur hirās,
Jaras bar girefteh nigihbān-é pās.
Na āwāyé murgh-u na harrāy-é dad,
Zamāna zabān basta az nik-u bad.
Nabud eech payda nashib-u farāz,
Dilam tang shud zān dirang-é darāz.

In yet another manner but still retaining the unmistakable distinction of his grand style is the following:

Alā ay dilārāy-é sarv-é buland,
Chi būdat ki gashti chunin mustamand?
Bidān shādmāni-u an farr-u zīb,
Chira shud dil-é roushanat-pur nahīb?
Chunin guft pursanda-ra sarvbun,
Ki shādān budam ta nagashtam kuhun.
Chunin sust gashtam binīrūy-é shast,
Biparhīz-u bā-ou masāz eech dast.
Dam-é azhdaha dārad-u chung-é shīr,
Bikhāyad kasi-ra ki ārad bizīr.
Hamāwāz-é ra'ad ast-u ham zûr-é karg,
Biyak dast barg-u biyak dast marg.
Zi sarv-é dilārāy chambar kunad,
Saman barg-ra rang-é amber kunad.
Gul-é arghawān-ra kunad z'āfirān.
Pas az z'āfirān ranjhāé giran.
Shawad basta biband pāy-é niwand,
Wazu khwār gardad tan-é arjumand.
Mara durr-é khushāb susti gireft,
Hamān sarv-é āzada pasti gireft.
Khurūshān shud in nargisan-é dizham,
Hami gīrad az susti-u ranj nam.
Dil-é shād-u khurram pur az dard gasht,
Chunin rūz-é ma nājawānmard gasht!

Firdousi is swift and direct in his manner. He never beats about the bush, does not turn to the right or to the left, but goes straight to the heart of his narrative. He does not resort to over-embellishment of phrase and figure of speech, and elaboration of far-fetched conceits—the baneful tendency of Persian poets, even the very greatest, to indulge in fine writing for its own sake.

Combined with the fluency and simplicity of his normal style there is a loftiness of expression which is unique as being achieved without the use of unusual or highsounding words, and without sacrificing clarity and precision of speech. He is stately without being stiff or turgid, and simple without being vulgar or commonplace.

Finally, let us linger over this grand passage typical of Firdousi's normal manner, illustrating all the distinguished features of his style, purity, fluency, simplicity, music and majesty of movement. There is not a single Arabic word in these 44 lines, and yet the expression is noble and superb:

Alā ay bar āwurdé charkh-é buland,
Chi dāri bipīri mara mustamand?
Chu būdam jawān bartaram dāshti,
Bipīri mara khwār bugzāshti.
Hami zard gardad gul-é kāmgār,
Hami parnayān gardad az ranj khār.
Dutāi shudān sarv-é nāzan bibagh,
Hamān tira gasht an furūzān chirāgh.
Puraz barf shud kuhsār-é siyāh,
Hami lashkar az shah bīnad gunāh.
Bikirdār-é mādar budi ta kanūn,
Hami rikht bar dard-é ma zār khūn.
Wafa-u khirad nīst nazidīk-é tu,
Puraz ranjam az rāy-é tārik-é tu.
Mara kāsh hargiz naparwarda būd,
Chu parwarda būdi nayāzurda būd.
Harāngih kizin tīragi bugzaram,
Bigūyam jafāy-é tu ba Dāvaram,
Binalam zi tu pish-é Yazdān-é pāk,
Fishānandé bar sar paragandé khāk.
Zi pīri mara tang dil dīd dihr,
Biman bāz dād az gunāhash du bihr.
Chunin dād pāsukh sipihré buland,
Ki ay mard-é gūyanda-é bīgazand!
Chira bīni az man hami nīk-u bad,
Chunin nāla az dānishi kay sazad?
Tu az man bihar bāraī bartarī,
Rawānra bidānish hami parwari.

Khur-u khwāb-u rāy-é nishastan turāst,
Binīk-u bibad rāh justan turāsti
Bidin harché gufti mara rāh nīst,
Khur-u māh azin dānish āgah nīst.
Azu khwāh rāhat ki īn āfrid,
Shab-u rūz-u āieen-u dīn āfrid.
Yaki ān ki hastish-ra rāz nist,
Bikārish farjām-u āgaz nist.
Man az āfrinash yaki banda-am,
Parastanda-é Āfrīnanda-am.
Nagardam hami juz bifarmān-é ouy,
Natābam hami sar zi paymān-é ouy.
Bi Yazdān girāy-u bi Yazdān panah.
Bar andāza za harche khwāhi bikhwāh.
Juz ou-ra madān Kirdigār-é sipihr,
Furūzanda-e māh-u nāhīd-u mihr

Generally Firdousi is not diffuse, but very terse and compact in his expression, and at times conveys a world of meaning in a single line or even a single word. A few Iliustrations may be given:

Bibinandigān Afrinanda-ra,
Nabini maranjān du bīnanda-ra.

This couplet has only six words, two in the first line and four in the second. "You cannot see the Creator with your eyes so do not distress them."

Jehān khwāsti yāfti khun marīz.

This line consists of just five words.
(Iraj says to his murderous brothers) "You desired to become masters of the world; you have accomplished that desire; do not shed my blood."*

Mara did bar jastu- yāfa naguft,
Dugūsham bikand-u hamānja bikhuft.

(The Keeper of the park in Mazenderan says this about Rustam) "He saw me, jumped up, spoke no idle words, but just plucked out both my ears, and went back to sleep on the spot."

* Noldeke observes "even Ruckert is unable to bring these words inside of a hemistich."

Nizhād-e Manuchehr-u rīsh-e supīd,
Tura dād bar zinŏagāni umīd.

"Your royal descent from Manuchehr and your white beard are what give you hope of your life being spared."
(Kay-Khusrav says this to Toos who has flagrantly disobeyed the royal orders not to proceed by way of Kelat on his expedition, and thus compassed the death of the king's half-brother Farud:)

Hama lashkar-é Toos ba in sipāh
Chu gāv-é supīd ast-u mūy-é siyāh.

"All the legions of Toos compared to these hosts are like a black hair on a white cow."

(The proportion between the two armies is so hopeless that the one would be lost amid the legions of the other, even like a single black hair on a white cow.)

Barān Shahryār āfrin khwandam,
Nabūdam diram jān bar afshāndam.

"I showered benedictions on the Monarch (Sultan Mahmúd); no dirhems (coins) had I to strew upon him; I spilt my very soul." The Poet refers to the Iranian custom of strewing gold and silver coins upon the head of a person in token of affection and devotion and adroitly conveys to the King, in one breath, both his penniless state of indigence and his heart-felt loyalty and devotion.

Parastandé ba māh didār guft,
Ki hargiz namānad sukhun dar nihuft,
Magar ān ki bāshad mayān-é du tan,
Si tan na nihānast-u chār anjuman.

The maid said to the moon-faced beauty (Rudabeh) "there is no secret possible except between two persons only; with three it ceases to be a secret and four make the public." (The idea is that a secret can at best be preserved between two persons only. If it is divulged to a third it ceases to be a secret; and four persons are as good as an assembly of people).

Chunin guft Bahrām kay razm-juy,
Nakushti mara sūyé khargih mapūy.

Tu gufti sukhun bāsh-u pāsukh shanav,
Agar bishnavi zinda māni birav.

Each of these two couplets consists of just 11 words, and yet look at the world of meaning which they convey:

Thus spake Bahrām: "Oh you who are so eager to fight, you have not yet killed me, do not run back to your pavilion. You have said your say; stop and receive the reply. If after receiving my reply you remain alive, then go." Bahrām Chūbin says this to the combatant who thinking that he had killed Bahrām by the thrust of his lance was preparing to leave the battlefield in triumph.

At times Firdousi is exceedingly felicitous in the choice of single words to express a composite idea.

Bidān parwarānidam in tār-ra,
Ki ta dastgiri kunad yār-ra.

Rudábeh says this to Zál when the lovers meet for the first time, and she lowers her long locks of hair asking Zál to seize hold of it and thus climb the battlement. "I have grown these tresses for this purpose that they may make a help and handle for my lover." The single word *dastgiri,* is the most appropriate and expressive that can be conceived of in this context. It is commonly used in the sense of help, assistance, support. But here its literal meaning 'holding by the hand' is also suggested.

Agar zīr dasti shavad pur manish,
Bishamsīr yābad zi ma sarzanish.

"Should a subordinate become arrogant, and recalcitrant, he would receive a reprimand from us with the sword." Here the use of the word *sarzanish* is again extraordinarily apt. It ordinarily means reproach, reprimand, correction. But its primary meaning 'striking off the head' is directly suggested in connection with the sword.

A few examples may be given of simple, powerful lines in which Firdousi produces the maximum of effect by means of the simplest and homeliest words:—

Harānja ki roushan shawad rāsti,
Furūghé durūgh āwurad kāsti.

"Wherever the lamp of Truth is lit, the light of falsehood fails."

Agar chand māni bibāyad shudan,
Pasé ān shudan nist bāzāmadan.

"However long you may live, in the end you have got to go; and after that going there is no coming back."

Bad-u nik bar ma hami bugzirad,
Khiradmand mardum chira gham khurad?

"Good and evil both pass away; why should the wise grieve?"

Garash bār khār ast khud kishtaī,
Wagar purnayān ast khud rishtaī.

"If its fruit is a thorn you yourself have sown it: if it is silk you yourself have spun it."

Dile-é shād-u khurram pur az dard gasht,
Chunin rúz-é ma nājawānmard gasht!

"The glad and joyous heart is now full of pain and grief. Ah even thus has life become mean and niggardly with me:"

Chunan fāsh gardad gham-u ranj-u shūr,
Ki rāmish bihangām-é Bahrām-Gūr.

"Grief and pain and tumult will become as rife as rejoicing was in the time of Bahrām-Gūr."

Tu gar ba dirangi dirang āwurim,
*Warat rāy-é jang ast jang āwurim.**

"If you are staid and peaceful we too shall be peaceful; if you seek strife we shall bring strife."

Aya bād bugzar bi Irām zamin,
Payāmi zi man bar bi shāh-e guzin.

"O Breeze! blow towards Iran and carry my sad message to my noble Sovereign!"

Jehān chun man-u chun tu bisyār dīd,
Nakhwāhad hami ba kasi ārmīd.

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* This verse was quoted by Qaid-i-Azam Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, in one of his speeches.

"The world has seen many like you and me. It will not keep faith with any one."

Yaki rūz mard ārzumand-é nān,
Digar rūz bar kishwari marzbān.

"Today a man begs for bread; tomorrow he becomes the lord of broad lands."

Mara kunj-é ghāri-u nān-é jawi,
Bih az Marzbāni-u Kaykhusravi.

"To me a secluded corner in a cave and a crust of coarse bread are more welcome than satrapies and sultanates."

Na bar biguneh kushta āmad Farūd,
Nabishteh chunin būd-u bud ānché būd.

"It is not as if Farúd was slain without cause. It was so writ, and what had to be has come to pass."

It is also a characteristic of Firdousi's style that often, while the first line of a verse is quiet and ordinary, the second suddenly rises to unexpected heights. Firdousi is never altogether commonplace:—Thus:

Az Iran bikāri burūn āmadīm
Shanāwar bidarya-é khūn āmadīm.

"We launched upon an expedition from Iran; and have waded through multitudinous seas of blood!"

Bi Turān zamin razm-u kīn āwurim
Bijang āsmān bar zamīn āwurim.

"We shall carry fire and sword into the land of Turan; in battle we shall strike down the heavens upon the earth."

Bi Iran chu āyad pay-é farrukhash,
Bi charkh ānché pursad dihad pāsukhash.

"When his blessed feet shall touch the soil of Iran, the heavens will render obedient answer to his demands."

Wazān pas bimālash yaki parr-é man
Khujasta buvad sāya-é farr-é man.

"Then rub on the wound one of my feathers; the shadow of my glory will prove auspicious."

Wara Bezhun-é Gīv khwānad hami,
Ki khun b'āsmān bar fishānad hami.

"He is known as Bezhun of Giv—who can sprinkle blood on top of the sky."

Zi chougān-é ou gūy shud napadīd,
Tu gufti sipihrash hami bar kashīd.

"By the stroke of his polo-stick the ball was lost to sight. You might say the sky had sucked it up."

Ki khūn-é chunin khusravi rīkhti,
Hami kuh dar gardan āwikhti.

"You have shed the blood of such a Prince—that you have hung round your neck the weight of a veritable mountain."

Sometimes he conveys the character of a battlefield in a single verse:—

Tu gufti jehān yaksar az joushan ast,
Sitāra bi nouk-é sinān roushan ast.

"You might have said that the whole earth is clad in armour, and the stars are glittering with the points of spears."

Occasionally, he creates a pleasant surprise by inverting the natural order of comparison. Comparing the cheeks of beauties to roses in common and hackneyed. Firdousi reverses the comparison thus:

Hama sāleh rūzash bahārān budi,
Gulān chun rukh-é guludhārān budi.

"All the year round its days were bright and fresh as in Spring. Its flowers were like the cheeks of the rose-cheeked beauties."

Notice the terse vigour and felicity of this:

Chunān garm shud Rakhsh-é ātash gohar,
Tu gufti bar āmad zi pahlūsh par.

"The fiery Rakhsh became so hot that you might fancy wings sprang from his sides."

When an urgent message is sent to a person to come immediately on reading the missive, Firdousi's picturesque manner of expression is:

Ki gar gil bisar dāri aknun mashūy,
Agar dasta dāri bidastat mabūy.

"If your head is soiled with dust do not stop to wash it; If you have a bouquet in your hand do not pause to smell it."

As a true poet Firdousi almost always speaks in pictures, and the utterance is appropriate to the occasion and the speaker. Thus in answer to Sohráb's boyish bluster Rustam says:

Bidū guft narm ay jawān-mard, narm,
Zamin khusk-u sard-u hawa narm-u garm.
Mara dīd dar jang darya-u kuh,
Ki ba nāmdārané Turān guruh,
Che kardam sitāra gawā-é manast.
Bimardi jehān zīr-é pāy-é manast.
Nigeh kun mara ta bibīni bijang,
Agar zinda mani matars az nihang.

"Thus spake Rustam: 'Soft, O young man, soft; the earth is both dry and damp, and the air mild and fierce. The ocean and the mountain have seen me in fight, and the stars bear witness to what I have done to the hosts of Turan. I have brought the whole earth under my feet by my prowess. Regard me well in battle, and if you survive it then do not fear the fell crocodile!"

The wonderful fertility of Firdousi's imagination may be seen in the variety of images he calls up to describe the phenomena of sunrise and sunset. To give a few instances, sunrise is thus variously described:

Chu zad bar sar-é kuh bar tīgh shīd,
Jehān shud bisān-é bilur-é supīd.

"When the Sun struck his sword upon the head of the mountain, the earth became bright like pure crystal."

Chu khurshīd ān chādar-é qīrgūn,
Biderrid-u az purdeh āmad burūn.

"When the sun tore asunder that black sheet and emerged out of his purdah."

Chu khurshidé rakhshān bigustard par,
Siyeh zāgh-e parrān furu burd sar.

"When the refulgent sun spread his plumage the black raven of the night folded up his wings."

Chu khurshid shamsīr-é rakhshān kashīd,
Shab-é tira-ra gasht sar napadīd.

"When the sun drew his flashing blade, the dark night had its head cut off."

Chu bar zad sar az burjé kharchang shīd,
Jehān gasht chun rūy-é Rumi supīd.

"When the sun raised his head from the sign of the Cancer (crab), the earth was lit up like the face of the Roman."

Chu khurshid-é tābanda bin'mūd chihr,
Jehān kard az chihr-e khud pur zi mihr.

"When the shining sun displayed his dazzling countenance, he made the world full of light and love." (*Mihr* means both light and love).

Chu khurshid zad panja bar pusht-é gav
Zi hāmun barāmad khurúsh-é chakāv.

"When the sun struck his paw upon the back of the Bull (Taurus) the song of the lark arose from the woods."

Chu bin'mud khurshid-é rakhshān kuláh,
Chu simin sipar gasht rukhsār-é māh.

"When the sun showed his resplendent crown, the cheeks of the moon became pale like a silver shield."

Chu khurshid bar charkh bin'mūd dast,
Rukh-é tira shab-ra binākhun bikhast.

"When the sun stretched out his claws upon the sky, he scratched the dark face of night with his nails."

Bishabgīr chun shīd khanjar kashīd,
Shab-é tira az bīm shud napadīd.

"At dawn when the sun drew his bright dagger the dark night fled away in terror."

Bar āyad rukh-é kuh rakhshān kunad,
Zamin chun nagīn-é Badakhshān kunad.

"When the sun rises and lights up the face of the mountain and makes the earth brilliant like the ruby of Badakhshán."

For Sunset we have:

Chu Khurshīd-é tābande shud nāpadīd,
Dar-é hujra bastand-u gum shud kilīd.

"When the shining sun disappeared the palace gates were closed and the golden key was lost."

Chu khurshid-e tābanda bin'mud pusht,
Hawa shud siyáh-u zamin shud durusht.

"When the bright sun turned his back, the atmosphere became dark and the earth harsh."

Jehān gasht chun rūy-é zangi siyāh
Na khurshīd payda na parwin na māh.

"The earth became dark like the face of the Ethiopian, and neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the Pleiades could be seen."

Zamin qirgun kuh chun nīl shud,
Sitāra bikirdār-é qandīl shud.

"The land became like pitch, the mountains sombre blue and the stars shone like candles."

Chu payda shudān chādar-é mushk-rang,
Sitāra baru hamchu pusht-é pilang.

"When that dark and murky sheet was spread the stars upon it showed like the leopard's skin."

Nizámi in his Sikandar-nama has followed Firdousi in this respect, and employs various striking images to describe the phenomenon of Sunrise and Sunset. But the naturalness of Firdousi's images, are in refreshing contrast with Nizámi's artificial and elaborate metaphors: For instance, Nizámi has:

Chu yāqūt-é khurshid-ra duzd burd,
Biyāqūt justan jehān pay fushurd,

Biduzdi gireftand mihtāb-ra.
Ki in burd ān gouhar-é nāb ra.

"When the ruby of the Sun was stolen by a thief, the world exerted itself in searching for the ruby. They at last caught the Moon, and said, 'Lo! here is the thief who purloined that pure jewel!' "

The Shahnama is full of verses having the brevity, energy and condensed wisdom of proverbs and aphorisms:

Tawāna buvad harki dāna buvad;

"Knowledge is power."

* * * * *

Bikirdār-é kishtist kār-é sipāh,
Hamash bād-u ham bādbān padshah.

"The army is like a ship to which the king is both sail and gale."

Az imruz kāri bifarda mamān,
Chi dāni ki farda chi gardad zamān.

"Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today. What do you know how things will shape tomorrow?"

Sipardi dum-é mār-u khasti sarash,
Bidiba bipūshīd khwāhi barash.

"You trampled on the snake's tail and wounded his head, and then wish to wrap his body in soft brocade."

Gurīzi bihangām-u sar bar bijāy,
Bih az pahalwāni-u sar zīr-é pay.

"To flee from the press of battle with one's head on one's shoulders is better than feats of heroism with the head trampled under foot."

Satizeh bijāyi rasānad sukhun,
Ki wairan shawad khān-u mān-é kuhun.

"Quarrels in the end lead to the destruction of ancient and noble families."

Firistāda guft ay khudāvand-é Rakhsh,
Bidasht āhu-é nāgirefté mabakhsh.

"The messenger said to Rustam, O thou lord of Rakhsh, do not make a gift of the uncaptured deer on the heath."

Sukhun harché bar guftanash rūy nist,
Derakhti buvad kish bar-u būy nist.

"A speech the utterance of which is improper is like a tree without fruit or fragrance."

Tawāngar shawad harki khushnūd gasht,
Dil-é ārzu khāna-é dūd gasht.

"He is rich who is contented; a heart full of craving is full of vain vapours and smoke."

Harān kas ki dārad zi gīti umīd,
Chu jūyanda khurmāst az shākh-é bīd.

"Whoever entertains hopes of the world is like one who expects dates from the willow-tree."

Ki gar khar nayāyad binazdīk-é bār,
Tu bār-é girān sūy-é pusht-é khar ār.

"If the donkey does not go to its load, you take the load to the donkey's back."

Ki murghi ki zarrin hami khāya kard,
Bimurdu sar-é bāzh bimāya kard,

"The goose that laid the golden eggs is dead, and the source of the subsidy has been dried up."

Buzurgi sarāsar biguftār nist,
Du sad guft-a chun nīm kirdār nist.

Greatness does not consist in talk; two hundred speeches are not equal to half an action.

Chu bargīri az kuh-u nan'hi bijāy,
Saranjām kuh andar āyard bipāy.

"If you take from even a mountain and not replace what you take, in the end the mountain itself would vanish."

Biyak khāna gunjand dih pārsa,
*Bi mulki nagunjand du pādsha.**

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* Saadi has paraphrased this in the wellknown passage:
Dih darwish dar gilimi bikhuspand, du Padshah dar iqlimi nagunjand.

"Ten devotees can live in one hut, but two kings cannot be contained in one kingdom."*

Ki dāna agar dushman-é jān buvad,
Bih az dūst mardi ki nādān buvad.

"It is better to have a wise man for one's foe than a fool for friend."

It is not merely Firdousi's pride in the glorious past of his native land and its ancient rulers, but the quality of his imaginative land and its ancient rulers, but the quality of his imagination—lofty and imperial—which inspires him to utter sentiments like the following:

Tura ba chunin rūy-u in būy-u mūy,
Zi charkhé chahārum khur āyad-'t shūy.

"Thou with such a face and hair and fragrance—the sun himself would come down from the fourth Heaven to claim thee for his bride."

Bisoug-é Siyāwash hami jūshad āb,
Kunad charkh nafrin bar Afrāsiyāb.

"The waters of the sea are ever boiling in anguish and lamentation over the death of Siáwush, and the heavens rain imprecations on Afrāsiyāb.

Darideh jigargāh-é pūr-é jawān,
Ki giryad bar-u charkh ta jāwidān.

"I ripped open the breast of my young son, on whom the sky will weep for ever and ever."

Surûsh ar biyābad chu īshān urūs,
Magar pishé har seh dihad khāk būs.

"Should Surush (the Angel Gabriel) himself obtain a bride like these beauties he would stoop low and kiss the dust under their feet."

Zi khūn-é Kayān sharm dārad nihang,
Wagar kushta yābad naderrad pilang.

"The fell crocodile would feel ashamed to shed the blood of these royal Kayáns, and the leopard would not tear their corpses."

Bitu dād dukhtar ki paywand-é māst,
*Ki Hindustan khāl-é oura bahāst.**

"He gave to you his daughter who is our relation, and the mole on whose cheek is worth the wealth of all Hindustan."

Agar mihr ba kin nayāmīzadi,
Sitāra zi khashmash furu rīzadi.

"If he (the Monarch) did not temper his anger with his mercy the stars themselves would drop out of their spheres in fear of his wrath."

The idea literally taken is absurd, but only the splendour of Firdousi's imagination could conceive of a monarch, so powerful and exalted, that stars would drop out of their spheres by the terror of his royal wrath.

CHAPTER XX

METRE AND RHYME.

The whole of the Shahnama is written in the metre known as Bahr-i-Taqárub. It is the simplest and most popular of Persian metres. It may be represented thus: U - - / U - - / U- - / U -. So far as it is possible to represent it in English, Warner has expressed it by a line like this:—"The Pharoahs of Egypt the Caesars of Rome."

It is also one of the recognised Masnavi metres employed in the composition of long narrative, descriptive or reflective poems. In Nizāmi's *Khamsa* a separate Masnavi metre is used for each of the five poems, one of them being the metre of the Shahnama. Nizāmi has employed this in the composition of the *Sikandarnama*, which, as stated before, in point of manner and substance, comes nearest to Firdousi's epic. Besides the Shahnama and Nizāmi's Sikandarnama, the whole of Saadi's Būstān is also written in this metre. It is the fastest and most flexible of Persian metrical systems. The other Masnavi metres are utterly unsuitable for poetry of action. An epic of action like the Shahnama would be intolerable in

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* Hafiz's famous verse
Agar an Turk-e shirazi bidast arad dil-e mara,
Bi khal-e Hindwash bakhsham Samarqand-u Bukhara-ra.
was probably inspired by this couplet.

the *Ramal*, slow, heavy and ruminating, used by Rūmi for his great Masnavi, and by Attār for his *Muntiq-ut-Tayr*. Even the more lively *Hazaj*, employed by Nizāmi for his Khusrav-Shírín and by Jámi for his *Yusaf-Zuleikha*, would have rendered the Shahnama unspeakably tedious. The *Taqārub* alone with its speed and flexibility is equally suitable for both heroic and lyric poetry. Firdousi's lyric faculty is hardly inferior to his epic power, and there are magnificent lyric passages, real songs, interspersed in the narrative. It is a pity that Firdousi did not think of relieving the monotony of his poem by writing these splendid songs in different lyric measures, as, for instance, is done by Shakespeare and Scott in English. But in Persian poetry so far no writer has considered it fit to break the uniformity of a narrative, descriptive, or reflective poem by introducing ghazals or fragments in different metres.

The poem is written in *bayts* or rhymed couplets. Generally speaking Firdousi is flawless in point of metre and rhyme. In all the thousands of verses he composed, there are very few instances of halting metre or forced or feeble rhyme. There are certain words which inevitably exact a stereotyped rhyme e.g. *peel* and *neel* or *Giv* and *niv* or *div*. But otherwise, his rhyming is perfect, and at times wonderfully felicitous. He is also fond of double rhymes, which frequently have a powerful effect enhancing the vigour and resonance of his expression:

* * * * *

Nighih kun barin gumbad-é tīzgard,
Ki darmān azūyast azu nīz dard.

* * * * *

Khirad afsar-é nāmdārān buvad
Khirad zīvar-é shahryārān buvad;
Hushiwār divāna khwānad tura,
Hamān khīsh bigāna dānad tura.

* * * * *

Hawa roushan az bārwar bakht-é oust,
Zamin paya-é nāmwar takht-é oust.

as also of internal rhyme in each hemistich:

Bitan zhinda pīl-u bijan Jabraīl,

* * * * *

Mayānash chu gharv-u biraftan tadharv.

Firdousi seldom indulges in a mere pun or play upon words or in obvious alliteration. He is on stray occasions obliged to prop up his verse with the aid of feeble expletives; and occasionally whole irrelevant lines are introduced merely to satisfy the exingencies of rhyme:

Sarāmad kanun kissa-é Bārbud,
Mabāda ki bāshad tura yār bad.

* * * * *

Yaki mard bud nām-é ou Bārmān,
Hami khufta-ra guft bidār man.

* * * * *

Wazān rūy-é Kābul bi Mihrāb dih,
Sarasar sināmat bizihr āb dih.

Very rarely we get openly alliterative lines like:

Sarasīma suyé Samangān shitaft.

* * * * *

Bikūh-é Kināmad kuni kārzār.

* * * * *

Zi purda parastār panj awurīd.

CHAPTER XXI

SALIENT FEATURES.

It is difficult and indeed futile to attempt an analysis of the elements of great poetry. Great poetry, like a great spectacle of natural beauty, makes its appeal to the human mind and emotions by its magnificence as one perfect whole. It cannot brook dissection. It is more than a mere sum total of similes and metaphors, striking figures and sonorous phrases. The ravishing charm of a beautiful woman—a Helen or a Cleopatra—is due to something more than a mere aggregate of eyes and lips, cheeks and hair. You cannot convey the beauty and grandeur of a great forest by merely

enumerating the number and nature of the trees in it. The spirit, the background and the atmosphere of great poetry are undefinable, though unmistakable. Without this spirit of true poetry, all other artifices and intellectual ingenuities are unavailing. The composition may amaze one by its cleverness, but it cannot thrill and inspire. A doll, pink-faced and cherry-lipped, blue-eyed, golden-haired, with faultless proportions and exquisitely chiselled features, just remains a doll. It lacks life.

Firdousi is among the great creative geniuses of the world who have the power to produce living forms and images of undying beauty and splendour out of the simplest possible elements. The earth and the heavens with their beauties and terrors, the great eternal processes of Nature, and the elemental passions and emotions of the human heart—these are the materials of his poetry. He derived his inspiration from these eternal emotions and passions which sway mankind, and from the sun, the moon and the stars, the floating clouds and running waters, fields and forests, "Summer rose and vernal bloom, and flocks and herds and human face divine."

But Firdousi, though a great natural poet, is at the same time a conscious artist. It is as true of him as of Homer that he combines in his epic in a supreme degree the vital primitive force of great natural utterance with artistic beauty and symmetry. He has the power of true and vital poetry which carries the mind forward by the force of its narration, regardless of all crudities, absurdities and anachronisms. In him, as in other Master-singers of humanity, Homer, Virgil, Valmiki, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, poetic art and poetic energy are blended together in perfect balance.

Nevertheless, the pre-eminence of the Shahnama in the literature of the East may be attributed to certain outstanding features relating to the subject-matter, and the style of the poem. The stature of an epic depends upon the loftiness of both subject-matter and style. It must deal with a mighty subject in a mighty manner. A great epic cannot be composed upon a mean theme. A war between the nations

of Lilliput and Blefuscu, however skilfully narrated, can at best be only a mock-heroic. Milton himself cannot make a true epic of it. On the other hand, even the loftiest theme becomes jejune without the grand style. Robert Montgomery chose the Creation as the theme of his aspiring muse. But his inflated bombast fell flat and led him nowhere.

Firdousi's theme is the history of a great imperial nation, with its triumphs and tragedies, its rise to world-dominion and inevitable downfall. Its wars and conquests, its kings and heroes, are conceived and presented upon the truly epic scale. The poet's pride in the achievements of his country is such that the affairs of the rest of the world are of no account. In his scheme of things only Iran and its enemies matter. The conflicts between Iran and its adversaries are the conflicts between the primeval powers of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness. Even the processes of nature are suspended and made subservient to the incidents he describes:

Sitāra nizāra barān jang bud.

* * * * *

Bizad tīr bar sina-é Ashkabūs

Sipihr ān zamān dast-é ou dād būs;

"The stars stood staring wonder-struck upon that battle-field."

* * * * *

"Low stooped the sky and kissed the hero's hand."

The adversaries of Iran, like Zahhák and Afrásiyáb are also conceived upon the same scale of epic grandeur.

But even apart from the legends, the actual historical achievements of Iran constitute a luminous chapter in the annals of human struggle and progress, and are altogether worthy of epic record. The Shahnama constitutes a graphic and glowing narrative of the battles and conquests, kingcraft, civil administration and social order, the chivalry, revelry, and policy,—the entire life of a warlike and gifted people. Ancient Iran is brought back to life in all its grandeur and turmoil. The Kings once again hold their splendid courts, the warriors

fight their battles over again, the statesmen and sages sit in high debate in solemn conclave.

Firdousi depicts every phase of national life in vivid colours and with a wealth of detail which holds up living pictures before the reader's eye. The manners and customs of kings and warriors, the etiquette of courts and embassies, religious rites and observances, marriage and funeral ceremonies and customs, feasting and drinking, sport and social habits of the people, are all described in the most expressive and vivid manner.

Firdousi does not indulge in mysticism of any sort; nor does he affect the Sufi doctrine which, in succeeding ages, so profoundly coloured Persian poetry. His poetry is plain, clean, and wholesome, the poetry of a strong and brave people, of the soldier, the hunter and the mountaineer; and his narrative partakes of the quality of Scott's poetry at its best and highest. There is a curious resemblance between the national poet of Iran and the national poet of Scotland, in point of patriotic fervour, sense of the picturesque, enthusiastic love for past history, healthiness and purity of tone, and the power of stirring and spirited narrative. But Scott as a poet never rises to the level of Firdousi, and none of his poems possess the compass, epic dignity, and superb diction of the Shahnama. Still, Scott would have been delighted to compose portions of the Shahnama, and in isolated passages he rises to epic heights:

"Brave Gael, my pass in danger tried
Hangs in my belt and by my side."

reads like a verse from the great epic; and

"What recked the chieftain if he stood
On Highland heath or Holyrood?
He rights such wrong where it is given,
If it were in the Court of Heaven!"

sounds like a mighty reverberation of Rustam's own voice.

The Shahnama is not a didactic poem. It is an epic of action, of battle and adventure, and history of a great nation

and splendid empires. It is not moral in the sense in which Rúmi's Masnavi or Saadi's Bústán, for instance, are moral. It has no direct didactic purpose. But in every episode, almost on every page, the Master inspires a living faith in the one God, in the beauty of virtue, in life after death and retribution. Patriotism, truth, courage, chivalry, loyalty to King and country, liberality, the soldier's virtues—are among the moral qualities which he inculcates and extols.

The great merit of Firdousi's poetry is its naturalness, high seriousness and absolute sincerity. He does not depend for his power upon meretricious ornamentation or bare intellectualism. The greater bulk of later Persian poetry is both artificial and, in the main, intellectual. It inspires admiration and indeed amazement at its intellectual feats; but it does not stir and thrill. Such is the quality of the poetry of great qasida writers like Anvari, Zahir, or Khāqāni. Take even a long brilliant performance like Jāmi's *Yusaf-Zuleikha*. It is in its class a master-piece, a magnificent specimen of the poetic art. It is perfect in point of eloquence, intellectual power and literary finish,—the work of a scholar and a master of the language and of the poetic art. But it lacks the sincerity, the spontaneity and sovereign power of great poetry. The same is true of other famous Persian compositions, like say, Nizāmi's Khusrav-Shirin. This class of poetry may be said to possess the artistic elegance of a Dutch garden, where the plants and flowers are artificially grown and grouped, trimmed and tortured into striking shapes, and the waters are made to flow through artificial channels and fountains of clever designs. But it lacks the indescribable charm and majesty, the soul-stirring beauty and power, of nature in her glory—of the forest with its woods and dales, glades and ravines, its uplands and lowlands, the free and luxuriant growth of bough and blossom, and the music of running waters. It has the rich overpowering scent of a perfumer's shop, but not the freshness and fragrance of the heath and the medow. The music of Anvari, Jāmi and Nizāmi is the music of the harp and the lyre; Firdousi's music is the music of the rolling waters and of the murmuring woods:—"Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea, pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free."—Theirs is the brilliance and

witchery of fairy lamps, and fireworks; his the glory of the sunrise and sunset, and of the starry heavens.

The epic of war and high adventure in Iran really begins and ends with Firdousi. All the later narrative poems of Iran are upon a lower plane. Those that aimed at heroic history are poetical failures; those that shine as poetry are inferior in subject-matter. Nor have any of these later compositions the historical value of the Shahnama. Firdousi was so absolutely true to his sources that there can be no question as to his sense of historical responsibility:

Gar az dāstān yak sukhun kam budi.
Rawān-é mara jāy-é mātam budi.

"My spirit would wail and grieve were I guilty of abating a single syllable from the source of my story."

He almost invariably mentions his sources. The groundwork of his narrative is an old history two thousand years old in his time.

Guzashta baru sāliyan du hizar.

When his sources fail him he is not afraid to leave a gap in the national chronicle. Thus, he skips over the entire annals of the Ashkānians, and dismisses 500 years of national history or anarchy in less than a dozen lines.

CHAPTER XXII

INFLUENCE.

It is universally acknowledged that no poet of Firdousi's stature has arisen in Iran till the present day. Even according to Western scholars, as an epic poet he is comparable to Homer alone. In any case, Firdousi's place is in the front rank of immortals, along with Homer and Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe. Vyas and Valmiki, the traditional authors of the great Indian epics, Mahabharata and Ramayana, also belong to this narrow circle; but individual authorship of these magnificent masterpieces is doubted, at least in the case of the Mahabharata. The Shahnama's claim to pre-eminence is twofold. It is both a literary master-piece and the complete nationalepos of Iran. It describes not only the political and

military history of ancient Iran but its entire life. It is at the same time poetry of the highest order. The only discordant note in this consensus of competent opinion, as regards Firdousi's position as a poet, is struck by the late Professor E. G. Browne, of Cambridge. In his view "the Shahnama cannot for one moment be placed on the same level as the Arabian Mo'allaqát;* and though it is the prototype and model of all epic poetry in the lands of Islam, it cannot, as I think, compare for beauty, feeling and grace with the work of the best didactic, romantic and lyric poetry of the Persians." But Browne expresses his opinion with a great deal of diffidence and hesitancy, and it is also obviously coloured by his well-known pro-Arabic proclivities. In fact, Browne, with all his immense knowledge of Persian history and letters, appears to have been deficient in taste, and strikes one as an admirer of the decadent and artificial poetry of later times. In any case, he fairly concedes that, in these matters, a foreigner has no right to impose his own views in opposition to native opinion which is indeed unanimous.

It is noteworthy that the vogue of the Shahnama spread not only in Iran but in all Islamic countries. It is Iranian culture that has, apart, of course, from the Qurán, influenced the entire world of Islam; and for centuries the Shahnama summed up and represented the culture of Iran. It is a transcendent tribute to the overwhelming power of Firdousi's poetry that, in spite of its subject-matter, its standpoint, its definitely anti-Arab and, occasionally, almost anti-Islamic bias, the Shahnama obtained and has maintained such universal currency in the lands of Islam, and even among people, like the Tartars and Turkomans, whose names he execrated as the traditional enemies of Iran. The influence of the Shahnama was so great from the first, that a champion of Islam and Arab culture is said to have written an Omar-nama, to immortalise the second Khalif, in the time of Sultan Mahmúd himself, with the object of neutralising the effect of the Shahnama. This book is, according to Moulana Shibli, still extant; but who has

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* Comparing an epic like the Shahnama with the Mo'allaqat, the "Seven suspended Poems" of old Arabia, is absurd; and the great Arabic and Persian scholar, Shibli, pours ridicule upon the inceptitude of the comparison. Browne admits a constitutional aversion to epic poetry in general, and it is doubtful that he ever read any considerable portions of the Shahnama.

ever heard of it? "How many" the great Persian and Arabic scholar asks, "have heard of the names of the Abbaside and other Khalifs of Islam? But even children know Jamshíd and Farídun, Kay Khusrav, Afrasiyab and Isfandiyár." Even devout Muslims are better acquainted with the exploits of Rustam and Sohrab than with those of Islamic warriors like Khálid and Ziyar. The vogue of the Shahnama not only in Iran but in all the countries of Islam was a puzzle to Browne. But Firdousi's poetry is so potent that all narrow hatreds, prejudices, and bigotries give way before the magic of his muse. Shibli Nu'māni reflects the attitude of the cultured Mussalman of India when he says:—

Firdousi khuda-i sukhun hai, uski ágé bandun-ku
zaban khulni-ki kiya jur'at ho sakti hai?

"Firdousi is the God of Poetry; what power have the like of us to speak in his presence?"

The ancient Persian names celebrated by Firdousi in his epic, are household words, not only in Iran and Afghanistan, but in large parts of India and Central Asia. From Hoshang to Yezdegird, and Garshāsp to Bahrām Chūbin, the names of Firdousi's kings and warriors, are adopted in lands and peoples not necessarily of Iranian lineage. The entire nomenclature of the Parsis of India, both male and female, is, of course, derived practically from the pages of the Shahnama. It is remarkable that these Parsi names do not hark back to the original forms preserved in their religious books. They call their sons Faridun and not Thraitaono, Jamshīd not Yima Khshaita, Kaykobad and not Kavi Kawadha, Kay Khusrav and not Kava Husrava, Isfandiyār and not Spento-dāta, Ardashir and not Artakhshir. Even epithets and descriptive names bestowed by the poet upon his characters are bodily adopted by Parsis and Muslims e. g. Tahamtan, Piltan, Jehangir, Jehanbukhsh, Jehandarshah, Khurram, Shahriyar, Ruintan, Farrukh, Humáyun, Khujasta, Gulchehr, Gulandam, Mahrui, Namdar, Mihrban, Davar, Sarafraz, Shirmard, Shirdil, Sardar, Sipehdar etc.

It is almost ironical that the crowning glory of the Iranian muse should be associated with the name of a ruler who by

race, creed and culture was not only alien, but indeed antagonistic to Iran. But the sway of poetry is supreme and overrides all divisions of race, creed and country; and the tribes of Turan, the Tartars and the Turkomans, whom Firdousi execrated on almost every page of his epic, joined in the plaudits which greeted the immortal strains in which he sang the glory of Iran and confusion to its foes. * It is said that Toghral Arsalán, the last Seljuq prince, died fighting on the battlefield with the verses of the Shahnama on his lips:

Man an gurz-é yak zakhm bardāshtam,
Sipihra hamān jāy bugzāshtam.
Chunān bar khurūshidam az pusht-é zin,
Ki chun āsiya shud parishan zamin.

Aláuddin Ghúr, known as Jehánsúz, (world-burner) in order to avenge the treacherous murder of his two brothers at the hands of Bahramshah Ghaznavi, a descendant of Sultan Mahmúd, attacked Ghazni, massacred the inhabitants, sacked and set fire to the city, burning down every monument and vestige of Sultan Mahmúd's conquests and empire. For seven days the marauder destroyed the palaces and public buildings, streets, squares and markets of Ghazni, so as to obliterate all traces of the Ghaznavide empire. Yet, in the midst of this orgy of fire and rapine, he would sit down and read with flaming eyes the Shahnama, which was the greatest memorial of Sultan Mahmúd, and recite rapturously the immortal verses in glorification of that monarch.

The great figures and heroic incidents of the Shahnama instantaneously captured the imagination of the Iranians; and even Firdousi's contemporaries resorted to this great storehouse for illustrating and embellishing their writings. Thus, for instance, his contemporaries, Unsuri

Agar zi Dijla Faridun guzasht bikishti,
Bi Shahnama barān bar hikāyatast samar.

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* This unlucky Prince indeed appears to have had his mind replete with verses of the Shahnama. It is narrated that on one occasion when he was taunted by his enemy about his defeat, in spite of all his strength, valour and huge armies, he quoted in reply the couplet:

Zi Bezhun fuzun bud Human bizur,
Hunar ayb gardad chu bargasht hur.

"Human (Tartar warrior) was far superior to Bezhun in strength; but when fortune becomes adverse one's very merits become his drawbacks."

And Farrukhi:

Khusrav-é farrukh-siyar bar bāra-é daryāguzār,
Ba kamand andar mayān-é dasht-chun Isfandīyār.

The minds of his literary successors were replete with the riches of this inexhaustible mine. There are innumerable allusions to the Shahnama in Persian poetry; in fact it would be difficult to appreciate many a famous verse without a working acquaintance with the history it has preserved. Thus, to give only a few instances at random, take Anvari's celebrated elegy on the tragic end of Sultan Sanjar:

Bar Samarqand agar bugzari, ay bād-é sahar,
Nāma-é ahl-e Khorāsān bibar-é Khāqān bar.
Ay Kayūmarth baqa pādshah-é Kisra adl,
Way Manuchihr laqa Khusrav-é Afridun far.

Manuchehri has:

Haylat-e Zahhāk-é jādu gasht bātil sar-bi-sar.
K'āmad Afridun bidast andarsh gurz-é gāvsār.

Saadi sings

In ki dar Shahnāmaha awurdaand,
Rustam-u Iskandar-u Isfandiyar,
Ta bidānand in khudāwandan-é mulk,
Kaz basi khalq ast giti yādgār.

* * * *

Chunān sāya gustard bar ālami,
Ki zāli nayandīshad az Rustami.

And Rumi:

Zin hamrahan-é sust anāsir dilam gireft,
Shīr-é khudāy-u Rustam-é Dastānam ārzust.

Kháqáni:

Chu Bezhun dāri andar chih makhusp Afrāsiyābasa,
Ki Rustam dar kamin ast-u nihangi ziré khaftānash.

Hafiz:

Shavkat-é pur-é Pashang-u tīgh-é ālamgir ou,
Dar hama Shahnāmaha shud dāstān-é anjuman.

Zahīr-é-Fāryābi:

Afsāna gasht qissa-é Dāra-u Kay-Qubād,
Mansūkh shud sayāsat-é Jamshīd-u Ardawān.

Falaki-e Shirwáni, friend and contemporary of Kháqáni, has the following:

Sipihr-é majd-u m'āāli, muhit-é nuqtá-e ālam,
Jehān-é jūd-u m'āāni, chirāgh-é dūda-é Ādam,
Satuda rāy chun Ārish, sakha-fazāy chu Bahman,
Jehāngushāy chu Rustam, hunar-numāy chu Niram.

Násir Bukhari in praise of Sultan Oweis:—

Sham'-e Iran gūyamat ya māh-e Turān khwānamat.
Qibla-é dil dānamat ya k'āāba-é jān khwānamat.
Chun kashi dar bazm badeh dānamat Jamshīd-é waqt
Chun kuni bar Raksh jowlān pur-e Dastān khwānamat.

Maulana Lutfallah Nishapuri:

Hajāb-é rih āmad jehān-u madārash,
Zi rih ta nayandāzadat bar madārash.
Namānad zi dastān-e in zāl īman,
Tani ku buvad zūr-é Isfandiyārash.

Nizámi:

Shahna-é ma dānish āngih hirs dar hamsāygi,
Rustam-é ma zinda āngih dīv dar Māzinderan?
Purdeh bar dār az zamin bin'gar che bāri mirawad,
Ba azizān-é zamāna zir-é purda har zamān.
Ta bikharman khār yabi bar kulāh-é Yezdegard,
Ta bidāman khāk bini bar sar-é Noushirwān.

Farīd-e-Ahval

Hatim kaf-u Jam khatam-u Bahram sipah ast,
Rustam dil-u Sohrāb tan-u Giv sinān ast.
Khudāvand-é jehān sa'adān Faridun farr-é Rustam dil,
Ki ba mardīsh rūz-é kīn furu manad chu zan Bezhan.

Lami'i (author of the famous Qasida-i-Lámiyah):

Shud az shish nāmdar andar jehān shish chīzra warith,
Ki juz ba way nayābi ba kasi shish chiz dar gaihan,
Wafāy-é Iraj-u farhang-é Salm-u farr-é Afridun,
Zabān-é Zāl-u sahm-é Sām-u dast-é Rustam-e Dastan.

Qááni:

Najawānmardist chun Jābūsiyār-u Māhiyār,
Yar-é Dāra būdan-u dil ba Sikandar dāshtan.

Iran may be wiped out from the face of the earth but, thanks to Firdousi, the exploits of Iran will ever live.

There is no question that the soul of Iran has been kept alive by the strains of the Shahnama for a thousand years. Both as the vital source of national inspiration, and the grand prototype of great poetry, the Shahnama occupies a unique position in the world's literature. It is the inexhaustible mine on which the writers and orators of Iran have drawn for their subjects, figures and phrases. Firdousi is the father of most that is good, true and beautiful in the literature of Iran. From his pages soldiers have derived martial spirit and heroic ardours, statesmen have learnt policy, kings royal dignity, and the whole Iranian nation a pride and patriotism that have kept them together against a thousand calamities for a thousand years. Conquerors like Nadirshah turned to the strains of the Shahnama for inspiration and conquering zeal. The wise Abul Fazl exhorted the great Akbar to give his days and nights to its noble and stimulating pages. The wonderful renaissance which Iran witnessed during the last few years under the inspiring lead of Riza Shah Pahlavi, is also due to the soul of the nation having been kept alive by these immortal strains, during all these centuries of tyranny and tribulation. Throughout successive tumults and tragedies, endless suffering, helplessness and despair, the echoes reverberated from hall and hamlet of

Derighast Iran ki wirān shawad,
Kenām-é pilangān-u shirān shawad.
Hama jāy-é jangi sawārān budi,
Nishistangah-é shahryārān budi.

and the people clung to the proud imperial heritage which they owned:

Yaki yādgāri zi Sāssāniyān,
Ki chun way nabandad kamar bar mayān.
Ki dar jang shīrast-u bar takht shāh,
Furūzān bikirdār-é khurshid-u māh.

The University of Tehran on its entrance gate bears as its motto the mighty line

Tawāna buvad har ki dāna buvad.

"He has power who hath knowledge."

and scores of Firdousi's moral precepts are inscribed on the walls of this great pile of buildings.

CHAPTER XXIII

EPILOGUE.

Such was the poet, such is the poem, and such ancient Iran of glorious memory as described in the pages of the Shahnama. It is nearly a thousand years since the Master disappeared from the plane of earthly existence. Years before the subjugation of Hindustan by Muslim arms, half a century before the Norman Conquest, while it still wanted centuries of effort and struggle and progress, for Britain to blazon forth its name upon the page of history by its achievements in the field of action and of thought, the poet of Iran had accomplished his mission and crystallised his country's culture and history in a shape of enduring splendour. The Shahnama came centuries after the Iliad and the Aeneid, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana; but also centuries before the literary masters of modern Europe—Dante and Cervantes, Shakespeare and Milton, Voltaire and Victor Hugo, Goethe and Schiller. During this thousand years Iran herself has passed through a thousand calamities and vicissitudes, and lain torn and bleeding at the feet of a succession of tyrants and adventurers. Time has swept away the triumphs and tragedies of Iran. All the great figures of ancient story and legend, who made history, tragedy and poetry upon the soil of Iran, have vanished from mortal view:—the sturdy old blacksmith of Isfahan shaking his immortal banner in the face of a demon; Iraj pleading for his young life in vain; Farídun with the head of one murdered son upon his breast, uttering his terrible curse upon the other two; Zál after the tribulations of his forsaken childhood, rushing forward to meet that glorious daughter of the mountains in the first flush of a mighty love; Tahmina like a

celestial splendour breaking in upon the slumbers of the world-renowned warrior in the dead of night; Rustam thundering defiance to his king in the face of an astonished court; the boy Sohrab bounding away from his doating mother's side, to join his father's enemies; Siyawush passing through the mounting flames to prove his innocence against a foul charge; Bezhun surprised in the palace of Afrāsiyāb defying a host of enemies, half naked, with a dagger in his hand; Rustam marching forward on foot to meet a dread opponent with a single bow and arrow; Kay-Khusrav surrounded by his knights and paladins holding his brilliant courts; Gushtāsp shattering iron and anvil with a single stroke of his hammer in the market-place of Rūm; Isfandiyar impatient at the clumsy labours of the blacksmiths to free him from his fetters, bursting his bonds with one mighty effort; Bahrām Gūr snatching the Imperial Crown from between two ravenous lions; Bahrām Chūbin presenting himself before his soldiers in the garb of woman which his prince has bestowed upon him as a reward for his martial feats;—Sām, Gūdarz, Giv, Pirān; Afrāsiyab and Ardashir; Shāpur, Bahrām, Noushirwān, Khusrav and Yezdegird; the princes and potentates, paladins and peers; saints and sages; the peerless beauties; the Pishdādiyans and Kayānians; Ashkānians and Sassānians;—all have vanished and their place knows them not:

Jehān gar gushāde kunad rāz-é khīsh.
Numāyad saranjām-u āghaz-e khish.
Kinārash pur az tājdārān buvad,
Barash pur zi khūn-é savārān buvad.
Pur az mard-é dāna buvad dāmanash,
Pur az khūbrukh chāk-é pirāhanash.
Kuja ānki sūdi sarashra biabr,
Kuja ānki būdi shikārash huzhabr?
Kuja ān būtani pur az nāz-u sharm,
Sukhun gufatan-é khūb-u āwāyé narm!

"If the Earth should open up its secrets and expose its beginning and its end, her sides will be found teeming with crowned heads and her breast reeking with the blood of mighty warriors. Under her skirts will be found hosts of

sages and scholars, and in the folds of her garment crowds of resplendent beauties. Oh, where, where are all the mighty proud whose heads rubbed against the skies, the strong in arm whose quarry were lions and leopards? Where are those lovely ones full of grace and charm, of soft speech and tender voice?"

Gone too are those who came upon the scene in the place of these mighty ancients to compass or repair the ruin of Iran; Alexander and Omar; Hāroun and Māmūn; Mahmūd of Ghazni, Tughral Baig and Sanjar; Changiz, Halāgu and Taimur; Ismail Safavi, Tahmāsp and Abbās; Nādirshah, Karim Khan Zend and Muhammad Qājār:—the Greek, Arab, Tartar, Turkoman and Afghan conquerors and marauders; the Tahirides, Saffarides, Samanides, Ghaznavides, Seljucides, Taimurides, Safavides and Qājārs;—all in their turn with their hosts have passed away and vanished like a dream. But the Written Word remains and the star of Iran shines for ever:

Jehān yādgārast-u ma raftani,
Zi mardum namānad juz az guftani.

"The World endures whereas we pass away. Nothing survives of man except his Written Word."

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